

An Exploration of Grandparenting in Contemporary Ireland.

By
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Finally, to my father Paudge (RIP), who was a wonderful father. I have no doubt he would have made a wonderful grandfather.

Fiona Murphy, 2009.

Declaration

This work has not been submitted for assessment in any previous degree.

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Statement 1

This thesis is a result of my own work and my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. Other sources are acknowledged by explicit references. A bibliography is appended.

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Abstract

This thesis is based on original research that carried out qualitative interviews with families in Carlow and its surrounding areas. Carlow and its hinterland provide a mix of the traditional and modern with the transient lives of commuters and three generations living in close proximity. The aim of the research was to provide an insight into grandparenting by providing a voice for each generation in the family. This involved the interviewing of three generations; grandparent, parent and grandchild within one family unit.

The inclusion of the child's voice in research was deemed especially vital not only as it enriches and provides depth to the research but in recognition of the current trends in sociology to 'rediscover' childhood (Corsaro 1998). It will be asserted that in the light of this, it is necessary to include children in all research that affects their lives especially family research.

The research methodology consisted of qualitative interviews with three-generation families, specifically seven family units. The use of the families' life stories (Giele & Elder (eds) 1998) and individual family members' narratives are used here to formulate a perspective on family life and grandparenting in Ireland. This is considered not only useful in portraying the 'bigger issues' but also as intrinsic to the presentation of this research. This research did not want to lose the participant's voice when presenting its findings.

The transition into grandparenthood specifically whether it is expected or unexpected can often cause and influence an individual to assess their life regarding aging and their choice of grandparenting role. The research shows how certain grandparents especially the maternal grandparents' (mostly grandmothers) role is becoming ever more increasing and encompassing. Grandparents are seen in this research as not only childminders to their grandchildren but as a major financial support to their own children, pseudo-parents to lone parent families and separated families and pseudo-spouses/partners to their single and separated children.

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Chapter One: Introduction

This introduction provides a background to the study and an outline of the subsequent chapters. This research had the primary aim of investigating and exploring grandparenting in contemporary Ireland. This was undertaken in light of the changes that have been experienced in Ireland and across the Western world. Western societies in the 20th century experienced great change, with the processes of industrialisation, capitalism and modernisation. This created changes in all aspects of society including family changes as the traditional extended family became a distant memory.

These family changes included low fertility rates, low mortality rates, increase in divorce, reduced family size and the emergence of alternative family forms. The variety of family forms in contemporary society has occurred as the 'male breadwinner model' has weakened due to the increasing participation of women in the labour force, changes in ideology of marriage and the emergence of gender equality.

The changing role of grandparents has developed alongside the changes in society. Mortality rates are low; grandparents can often see their grandchildren grow into adulthood, which was not as likely in the past. The increase in divorce, separation, remarriage, lone parenthood and working mothers has created much change in the roles of grandparents and the roles grandparents take on in contemporary society. As grandparenting develops in the framework of these vast changes it is certainly a topic, which has been deemed significant to research in western societies including Ireland.

Background to the study

The reasons why this research was deemed significant specifically in Ireland relates to the limited previous Irish research, the changes in families and the increasing role of some grandparents in childcare. There is a limited amount of research that focuses specifically on grandparenting in Ireland. Lundström's research '*Grandparenthood in Modern Ireland*' 2001 is a notable piece of research, which provides a typology of grandparents in Ireland. It provides a good foundation but certainly more research centred on grandparenting is necessary. There is a much more comprehensive amount of research carried out on grandparenting internationally especially in Britain, America and Australia as will be highlighted in Chapter 2. This international research varies from issues such as how

grandparents feel about becoming and being a grandparent, their role in the childcare of their grandchildren to intergenerational relations.

The changing demographics of Ireland as in most Western societies has impacted and changed family structure. The low mortality rate means that people are living longer. “The number of persons aged 65 and over has increased at every census since 1961 from 315,000 in that year to 468,000 in 2006. This category now represents 11 per cent of the total population” (CSO 2007, p.1).

This means that within families grandchildren are more likely than ever before to have all four grandparents alive and to have at least some grandparents alive well into their adulthood. This combined with low fertility rates, “The percentage rate of births per 1,000 of the population in 2006 was 15.2% compared to 21.4% in 1950” (www.cso.ie/statistics/bthsdthmarriages.htm) have created a new structure of families and increased the number of life stages. The ‘beanpole’ family has been used to describe this new structure. The ‘beanpole’ family refers to a family in which one is more likely to have relations above and below their generation as opposed to in the same generation. The increased participation of women in the workforce, the changes family structure: lone parents, cohabiting couples and the availability of divorce can be added to these changes in family life. Women who are working when they have children are now seeking childcare either in the formal sector or the informal sector. Grandparents are often providing childcare either as “*the next best thing*” (Wheelock and Jones 2002) or to fill in the gaps of formal childcare. This can include bringing and collecting grandchildren to crèches and with older grandchildren providing care before and after school.

Key Objectives

There was a set of four key objectives that the research was based upon. The key objectives were:

1. To carry out a literature review of the sociology of grandparenting focusing on sources from America, Australia and Britain.
2. To conduct a literature review of the changing nature of grandparenting in Ireland.
3. To develop a methodology using interviews with three generations based on the life course research method.

4. To honour the voice of all family members including children and older people.

Outline of subsequent chapters

Chapter Two and Chapter Three are literature review chapters that provide a broad representation of the issues relating to the study from the relevant literature. Chapter Two: Literature Review – Grandparenting concentrates on the issue of grandparenting from a sociological perspective. Grandparenting research in Ireland and internationally is drawn upon in this chapter to illustrate the key issues. This chapter represents a key objective of this research to present a literature review of the sociology of grandparenting. Chapter Three: Literature Review – Contemporary Society can be considered a broader literature review that draws on various disciplines including sociology and social policy. This chapter discusses the changes, which have occurred to form Ireland's contemporary society: changing demographics and family changes. As grandparenting is a stage in later life, older people in society and aging are also sections in this chapter. Finally, the self-identity of people in current times and the modern search for the meaning of life are considered in an attempt to shed light on contemporary life. This provides a literature review of the changing nature of grandparenting in Ireland as set out in the key objectives.

Chapter Four: Methodology is a comprehensive account of the methods employed in this study. This is a presentation of how the key objective of conducting interviews with three generations using the life course research methods was achieved. The theoretical underpinnings and the research design are described along with the choice and explanation of methods. There is a concise breakdown of the sampling strategy and the subsequent sample. The ethical considerations when doing this research and the ethical protocol followed in the study are examined. There is a complete account of the data collection and data analysis that was undertaken by the researcher. Finally, the dynamics of the study entails the nuances of interviewing and developing a rapport with each generation.

Chapter Five, Six and Seven deal with the findings and a discussion on the findings. The findings and discussion section has been broken up into three chapters to aid the fluidity and accessibility of the section. Chapter Five and Chapter Six are linked with the two literature review chapters with regard to the findings that relate to these chapters. Chapter Seven has been included to allow the participant's voices shine through and illuminate the findings and

indeed the research as a whole. This is in line with a key objective of the research to include and honour the voices of all family members. Chapter Five: Findings and Discussion – Grandparenting talks about how the participants felt about becoming grandparents and their views, opinions and feelings on the role of a grandparent. The intergenerational relations between the generations of this study are assessed and the question of the dominance of maternal bonds over paternal bonds are analysed. Chapter Six: Findings and Discussion – Contemporary Society deals with the surrounding issues that influence grandparenting in contemporary society. Childhoods, families, the romanticism of the past, women in society, men’s ‘nurturing role’, community and self-identity are all topics covered in this chapter. Chapter Seven: Findings and Discussion – Personal Stories could be described as a presentation of key case studies which aim to ground the topics covered in the two previous chapters. These three findings chapters will be shown to illustrate key trends in Irish grandparenting practices:

1. The Unexpected or Expected Transition into Grandparenthood
2. The Middle Generation’s Situation
3. Connectedness
4. Reflexivity

Chapter Eight: Key Findings and Discussion concisely presents the key findings of this research. The key findings are discussed in a comparative fashion with an emphasis on previous international research on grandparenting.

Chapter Nine: Summary and Conclusion consists of a summary of the research and a review of the limitations of this study. The conclusion reflects upon the research as a whole centring on an attempt to provide a succinct account of grandparenting in contemporary Ireland based on main findings from the research.

Chapter Two: Literature Review – Grandparenting

Introduction

This literature review provides an account of the sociology of grandparenting as set out in the key objectives. The first section on ‘Intergenerational relations’ provides an introduction to the significance of researching grandparenting. The specific issues relating to grandparenting in the Irish context with reference to the previous Irish research and documents from a community service background are presented. The use of international research is primarily due to the limited Irish research solely on grandparenting. The international research from America, Australia and Britain provides a broader and varied base for research on grandparenting. This allows for the further development of issues (including those raised in community based documents), which are coming to the fore in Ireland. It must be noted that these issues have been prevalent internationally. This includes issues relating to divorce due to the relatively recent introduction of divorce in Ireland compared to America and Britain.

Intergenerational relations

The importance of research on grandparenting and intergenerational relations will be shown to have increased in recent years in Chapter Three. The changes in Irish society and most western societies including changing demographics, family types and childcare have had a major impact on grandparenting in Ireland. The importance of gender and age in influencing intergenerational relations will be presented here and serve as an indicator that the inclusion of the three generations in research on grandparenting is essential.

The relationships between generations, in this case the relationships between three generations are important in the study of grandparenting. It has been suggested that whether a grandparent is patrilineal (from the male side; the grandchild’s fathers family) or matrilineal (from the female side; the grandchild’s mothers family) is highly influential to the type of relationship the grandparent will have with their grandchild. “Research and theory regarding grandparent/grandchild ties consistently suggest the matrilineal lineage is favoured over patrilineal lineage” (Fingerman 2004, p.1028). The females in a family are considered to hold the reigns over the relationships within the family. It then occurs that women have closer relationships with their own mothers and pass this on to their children.

An influencing factor on the extent of grandparent-grandchild relationships is the relationship that the grandparent has with their own child and their child's spouse. Fingerman points out "...most research examining the role of the middle generation has either ignored the child's partner or assumed that both parents influence ties between grandparents in a similar manner"(Fingerman 2004, p.1028). The relationships between grandparents and parents is vital in the research of grandparenting especially when grandparents may be more involved in their grandchildren's lives than ever before.

Another aspect of intergenerational relations to look at in this study of grandparenting in contemporary Ireland is the way in which each generation views the importance of intergenerational relations. The oldest generation often rank the importance of the relationships the three generations have together much more highly than the younger generations. This is because the older generation have the most invested in the relationships between generations both emotionally and financially. The flow of intergenerational assistance is more likely to be from older to younger generations than vice versa.

"Like other relationships, the grandparent-grandchild bond is subjectively experienced by each participant. Intergenerational research typically focuses on one actor or the other, but we argue that taking the perspectives of both is a better test of the life course concept of linked lives and provides more valuable information about family dynamics"(Crosnoe and Elder 2002:1090).

Erikson (1950;1995) uses the concept of generativity to encompass this further. "Generativity is primarily the concern in establishing and guiding the next generation" (Erikson 1995, p.128). Erikson views generativity as a natural progression in adult life and is displayed in parents and grandparents. This may be linked to the notion of self-identity and the search for meaning to life. Grandparents may find purpose and inspiration in their relationships with younger generations of their family.

Intergenerational relations do not just impact on an individual family basis but also on a macro social level. It influences how we view relationships across the generations and can even influence the value we place on older people in society.

Grandparenting in Ireland

There is a limited amount of literature on grandparenting in Ireland. However, the literature and research available provides a solid foundation upon which further discussion and research can develop. It is interesting to note that the sources of many current writings on

grandparenting are from a community service background. Treoir, a non-governmental organisation, have published an information booklet *'Being there for them. A booklet for grandparents of children whose parents are not married to each other'* (Treoir 2004).

This seems indicative of the increasing role of grandparents and issues around grandparenting. It is no longer possible to ignore the importance of grandparents in current times and commentators have not missed this. Louise Holden in her article *'Grandparenting – why it's the next big thing'* tells us to "...expect the role of the grandparent to move centre stage" (The Irish Times 16th December 2003). Grandparenting today is different from the past in two respects; grandparents are more prevalent and new contemporary issues such as grandparents' rights and roles have emerged. The changing demographic trends in Ireland and across the western world have resulted in decreased mortality rates. This increase in life expectancy has a great influence for grandparents and grandparenting as now more than ever before grandchildren may have four living grandparents and many grandparents are seeing their grandchildren progress into adulthood. This combined with low fertility rates in Ireland has resulted in much smaller three-generation families than ever before.

The roles of grandparents have changed greatly in recent times due to these demographic changes and the structures of contemporary living. In comparison to grandparents of yesteryear, grandparents in current times may be providing childcare of some form whereas in the past as Hannan indicates grandmothers "...play(ed) a minimal role in child rearing while they play(ed) an important role in housekeeping" (Hannan 1977, p.10).

Lundström (2001) carried out qualitative research with 58 grandparents. The primary aim of the research was to gather the views of grandparents on topics relating to being a grandparent. This included their views on "becoming a grandparent...grandparenting...the future" (Lundström 2001:40). She provides a typology of Irish grandparents, which seems to be the only such classification of Irish grandparents. She identifies five categories of grandparents:

1. Non-involved grandparents
2. Proscribed grandparents
3. Custodial grandparents
4. Conscientious grandparents
5. "Supergrans"

The classification method, which Lundström uses, is similar to those in American literature. The classification is highly centred on the amount of involvement of the grandparent in childcare activities. It is beneficial in that each category provides scope to cover many issues, which face contemporary grandparents. It is useful to briefly explain what each category refers to and to indicate the specific contemporary issues at play. The Non-Involved Grandparents category is self-explanatory; grandparents have no involvement in their grandchildren's lives. In contemporary society, this could be due to the common relocation of people for work reasons and reflects how people are more likely to move away from the area they grew up in than in the past. In the Proscribed Grandparents category, the grandparents are having difficulties with access to their grandchildren. This category highlights the issue of grandparents' rights, in situations where grandparents are denied access to their grandchildren. The Custodial Grandparents have full care of their grandchildren. Grandparents' rights and support for grandparent caregivers are central to this category. Conscientious Grandparents provide childcare for their grandchildren. The increase of dual earner families will surely see the increase of this category in Ireland. The fifth group Supergrans are Conscientious Grandparents whose "...relationship with their grandchildren are based on equality" (Lundström 2001, p.87). These grandparents could have a major impact on the attitudes of their grandchildren to aging and are a huge asset to intergenerational relations in Irish society.

There are certainly many advantages to the study of grandparenting by classifying grandparent types. It means that the diversity of grandparents' experiences and roles will be encompassed providing a succinct view of grandparenting in Ireland. However, there are limitations in centring the study of grandparents on a classification system. It presumes that grandparents do not move between categories throughout their lifecycle. It may also suggest that every grandparent in a particular category has the same experiences and thus diminish the validity of the individual grandparent's experience.

The form of childcare provided by grandparents can vary from family to family. Treoir identify three ways in which grandparents may be involved in childcare "...informal and occasional childminding; supporting parents with the care of their children in the family home; providing the main care for grandchildren" (Treoir 2004, p.8).

It is acknowledged that the involvement of grandparents in their grandchildren's childcare can take a variety of forms but this is surely a reflection of the diversity of family types and situations in contemporary society. It may be insightful to consider these intergenerational issues for all grandparents while acknowledging the diversity of grandparenting roles within childcare. Lundström questions whether there is a shift of power balance in Irish families, as many of her grandparent's respondents commented on their perception of grandchildren holding power over two guilty working parents. "Additionally, grandparents reported that when working parents arrive home in the evening, they are too tired to interact with their children, feel guilty and compensate by acquiescing to their demands" (Lundström 2001, p.78).

This may be extended not only to two working parents but also to parents who are parenting alone, separated or divorced as they deal with the pressures and stresses of contemporary living. It may be possible to connect this perceived lack of discipline of children in current times to changes in the place of children within families and wider society.

The rights of grandparents; rights of access to grandchildren and rights when grandparents become the primary carer for their grandchildren are issues that have been rising to the social platform. The increase in divorce, separation, and unmarried parents has resulted in the access for grandparents to grandchildren being a current issue. Many grandparents especially paternal grandparents find themselves denied access to their grandchildren (Comhairle 2005). In Ireland, grandparents have no right to access to their grandchildren. This stems back to the Constitution where parents are given paramountacy over their children unless there are extreme circumstances. It is important to note that although there have been no constitutional changes made, there is certainly a shift towards consulting with children and a 'young children's citizenship' (Willow, Marchant, Kirby and Neale 2004). There are mediation services such as Family Mediation Services and Mediators Institute of Ireland, which "...works with the parents and grandparents together to help them work out a mutually acceptable arrangement regarding access" (Treoir 2004, p.14).

If this is unsuccessful, a grandparent may apply to the District Court for a leave to apply for access to their grandchild. It must be noted that this is only a leave to apply for access and not just a straightforward application for access. Parental Equality is group that advocates for equal parental rights between fathers and mothers. It also acknowledges that paternal

grandparents can often lose access to grandchildren because fathers do not have the same parental rights as mothers. Parental Equality believes that if both parents have equal rights,

“The present discrimination in favour of maternal grandparents and extended families, while isolating the father’s side of the family, will no longer be necessary...In this space grandparents can provide the wisdom and ease of age, the vital linkages through the family genealogy, and a comforting ear for the problems of growing children” (www.parentalequality.ie/new/welcome.php).

The existence of this group suggests the growth of the issue and is indicative of the increase in divorce, unmarried couples and lone parenthood, which are often the setting for disputes about access to children. The Comhairle Social Report ‘Supporting Grandparents...caring for their grandchildren’ focuses on “...State support for grandparents where they are caring for their grandchildren full time, access to grandchildren when children become separated or divorced and custody of grandchildren” (Comhairle 2005, p.3).

The driving force behind this report is a direct result of the increasing number of clients of Citizen Information Centres looking for information regarding the rights of grandparents. As already examined, many grandparents are concerned about their rights in regard to access to grandchildren but Comhairle also point to “...situations where grandparents take on responsibility of caring for grandchildren for reasons like mental illness, drug abuse, alcoholism, abandonment or the death of a parent...” (Comhairle 2005, p.4). Here, the issue of grandparent’s rights is regarding custody rights and various social benefit entitlements. A situation that many grandparents may find themselves in is where they are providing full time care for a grandchild but do not have legal custody and therefore are unable to apply for social benefits. There are many reasons why a grandparent does not apply for legal custody of their grandchild, including,

“...fear the parent of their grandchild may take the child back or away from them if they apply for custody...are reluctant to report their own child to the authorities for neglect or abuse and take care of the grandchild informally, hoping matters will improve...may be considered by the authorities to be too “old or ill” to be considered as foster parents” (Comhairle2005, p.14).

Citywide Family Support Network’s (2004) report ‘Supporting *Grandparents...Supporting Children*’ is based on qualitative research using focus groups in Dublin. The Citywide Family Support Network comprises of family support groups for drug users and family members of drug users in Dublin. Naturally, there are specific needs and issues to drug users and their families but it seems that grandparents caring for their grandchildren despite the varying reasons why this has occurred will have similar experiences. The findings from this research reiterated the lack of services, access to services and information about services and

entitlements. Grandparents who are full time carers for their grandchildren can apply for the Orphans allowance but this is considerably less than the money that foster parents get. Many grandparents in this study felt aggrieved by these differences. “Discrepancy between fostering rates and Orphans allowance was perceived as unfair”(Citywide Family Support Network 2004, p.12). It is not possible that two children; one a grandchild and one a foster child can cost different amounts to support and rear. The reasoning behind the differences in allowances seems to be a rational that takes into account the family’s (including the extended family) obligation to look after related children. This reasoning also underlies the use of grandparents as childminders to allow mothers to work. The section on older people in Chapter 3 will discuss whether the same rational regarding kin assistance exists when it is the older generation or grandparents that need help.

It also reported “...a general sense of helplessness and isolation for carers” (Citywide Family Support Network 2004, p.12). It seems that the lack of support for grandparents who are the full time carers of their grandchildren is a major reason for these feelings of helplessness and it is necessary for social policies, government agencies, community organisations and Irish society to address these issues.

The increasing involvement of grandparents in their grandchildren’s lives and particularly in the caring for grandchildren and their influence on their grandchildren’s development is apparent. For example, in Scotland the increasing role of grandparents in the caring of their grandchildren has brought about the setting up of “special classes to teach grandparents how to look after their grandchildren” (www.newsvote.bbc.co.uk). This is to instruct grandparents on current childcare practices as these have changed over recent years.

The promotion of services for grandparents, information for grandparents and grandparents’ groups would be a positive step to recognising and increasing the social profile of the important role of grandparents. Grandparents have been shown to have an increasing role in childcare particularly for young children to allow mothers to remain in the labour force. This influences social policies concerning childcare particularly relating to the issue of formal versus informal childcare as discussed throughout this research. The changes in family types influences the type of role a grandparent takes on and raises concerns for grandparents’ rights and access to grandchildren. The significance of the role of grandparents can be viewed as a multi-dimensional issue in both an individual family level and within wider society.

International Grandparenting Research

A look at international research especially from America, Britain and Australia provides useful insight into contemporary grandparenting. It will be possible to trace the findings and theories of the international research onto the Irish case and see what fits and what does not fit.

A universal aspect of grandparenting is that grandparents share many feelings and attitudes on becoming a grandparent and being a grandparent. Neugarten and Weinstein (1964) described five categories of the views that grandparents have to the significance of their role. These are:

1. Biological renewal and/or continuity
2. Emotional self-fulfilment
3. Resource person to child
4. Vicarious achievement through child
5. Remote- little effect on the self

The first category biological renewal and continuity is one that is easily understood. The hope that our descendents will live on long after we die, that the family name will live on and such thoughts are common among most people. It is perhaps a more poignant aspiration as we grew older and our own mortality becomes more evident. Neugarten and Weinstein point out a gender difference between grandparents when they consider biological renewal and continuity. "It is likely that grandfathers perceive family continuity less frequently through their female than through their male offspring..." (Neugarten and Weinstein 1964, p.201).

Gender is a recurrent theme in the study of grandparenting. It is simple to understand the issues at play here, as they are similar between parents and in the wider society. Women's roles are placed firmly as the homemaker, the childminder, and an emotional support whereas men's roles are rooted in financial assistance and outside the home. Perhaps in contemporary Ireland though it is not this simple. Men and masculinity are beginning to be seen beyond one dimension of old clichés and traditional views on what it means to be a man and masculine.

“Changes in family life, gender relations and childhood meant that men are now expected to be more actively involved as fathers and partners than was the case 30 or even 20 years ago” (Ferguson and Hogan 2004, p.20).

The next category emotional fulfilment states that the grandparent sees their role as a new opportunity to create a new emotional connection, that maybe they were not able to achieve before. “Frequently, grandfatherhood offered a certain vindication of the life history by providing emotional self-fulfilment in a way that fatherhood had not done” (Neugarten and Weinstein 1964, p.201). This may be a gendered issue for grandfathers as displayed here; it is certain that when grandfathers were fathers the role of father was very different. This has been illustrated by Ferguson and Hogan (2004) to be the case in Ireland. It is possible though that it is also a universal feeling for all grandparents regardless of gender. The situations grandparents may have been in when they were parents, the lessons they have learned as parents and the situations they find themselves in as grandparents could greatly influence their grandparenting.

We all strive to do things better second time round and it seems for many grandparents the opportunity for this lies in their role as a grandparent. As one grandfather states in Neugarten and Weinstein’s research, “I was too busy with my business to enjoy my kids but my grandchildren are different. Now I have the time to be with them” (1964, p.201). Many grandparents may also be more relaxed than when they were parents as their grandchildren are not their primary responsibility. It could be said they have the pleasure without the responsibility and this allows them to take a relaxed approach to grandparenting.

The last two categories: vicarious achievement through child and remote can be considered as focusing on the grandparent themselves. The grandparent feels that their grandchild will achieve their own dreams in the vicarious achievement through child category. This is a stark contrast with the category of remote where the grandparent feels that the role of grandparent is meaningless. It would be interesting to see if through research a connection can be discerned if feelings like these are present in grandparents who are living far away from their grandchildren or grandparents who have strained relationships with the parents (their own children or their child’s spouse).

The increasing numbers of grandparents particularly grandmothers providing some form of childcare is not just in Ireland as has been shown but also across the western world.

“There is therefore a potentially serious conflict between two current goals of employment policy in the UK, and possibly in the EU more widely; on the one hand the goal of raising the employment rate of seniors in order to improve labour supply and address difficulties in the pension provision, and on the other hand the goal of increasing the proportion of mothers in work” (Gray 2001, p.575).

This is the case in Ireland as Gray suggests, there is an emphasis on helping mothers to remain in the workforce by tackling childcare issues. At the same time, there is a lot of worry about our population getting older and an encouragement of older people to remain in the workforce. Fine-Davis (2004) in her article *‘The Childcare Policy Debate in Ireland’* tells of a shift in the thinking regarding women’s roles and responsibilities. She shows how *‘The Second Commission on the Status of Women’* advised that public policy should promote the reconciliation of family and work responsibilities. Social policy in Ireland and in many western countries has focused on the formal childcare sector but there is a problem with this strategy. Informal care particularly provided by relatives is viewed by parents as a preferably form of childcare than formal childcare this in some case is due to the high cost of formal childcare and the media horror stories of formal childcare (Fine-Davis 2004). It is also “reflects the recent recognition being to the importance of relationships during the critical early years of life” (Wheelock and Jones 2002, p.19). As Wheelock and Jones point out “...a survey conducted by Mori for the Daycare Trust found that 40 per cent of respondents saw support from family and friends as an essential precondition for mothers to return to work”(Wheelock and Jones 2002, p.442).

The social policy implications and the macro social level of grandparents being more and more involved in caring for their grandchildren has been discussed. It is important to consider the micro social level. This entails an exploration of how grandparents feel themselves about their role in minding their grandchildren. Goodfellow and Lavery (2003) tackle these issues and found that “...underpinning all the stories was a desire on the part of grandparents to support their adult children’s wellbeing. Associated with this was an intense desire to be part of their grandchild’s everyday life” (Goodfellow and Lavery 2003, p.17).

There are challenges for grandparents providing childcare, both on a personal level regarding their own emotional and health needs and in relation to the negotiation of childcare. There is “...the need for grandparents to achieve the right “balance” in their lives- juggling family

contribution, obligation and independence in care negotiations”(Goodfellow and Lavery 2003, p.19).

The over emphasis of the needs of the labour market, parents and children and the under emphasis of the needs of grandparents must be avoided. The needs of grandparents are important in their own right but also because they influence child development and intergenerational relations.

Grandparents today may possibly be the most significant and stable family members. The changes in family life and family types such as blended, step and sole parent families have resulted in grandparents often being the only constant people in the family for children. The role of step grandparents is a relatively new phenomenon especially in Ireland because of the relatively late introduction of divorce. It is often the case that step grandparents will have a stronger relationship with grandchildren than biological grandparents.

“When step-grandparents share many years of life with step-grandchildren, especially during the grandchildren’s formative years, the intergenerational bonds that develop may equal or surpass those of biological relations—particularly in cases where custody arrangements preclude contact with biological grandchildren”(Giarrusso and Silverstein 1996, p.20).

It is certain that issues relating to grandparents’ rights are coming to the fore in Ireland in recent years. These issues have been present in America for longer than in Ireland. Grandparents’ rights in America illustrate this. “...All states now have grandparents’ rights legislation, which gives grandparents the power to go to court to secure their right to visit their grandchildren”(Giarrusso and Silverstein 1996, p.20). It is foreseeable in the future that grandparents in Ireland will be given similar rights to those in America.

The grandparent caregiver has been discussed in the Irish case and the issues and experiences of grandparent caregivers are the similar across the western world. In 2000, about 6 million children in America lived with grandparents and other relations. Laundry-Meyer and Newman state,

“The grandparent-grandchild family structure is often not recognised as a “legitimate” family structure. The lack of recognition may contribute to a grandparent caregiver’s ambiguity concerning role enactment”(Laundry-Meyer and Neuman 200, p.1009).

The effect on the grandchildren, the effect on the grandparents and the loss of the grandparent relationship when the grandparent takes on the parental role are vital areas in the study of the grandparent caregiver role.

Conclusion

The sociology of grandparenting is a key area of social research. Grandparenting has become more significant in current times due to changing demographics and many grandparents' increased role in the care of their grandchildren. This is influential on social policies regarding childcare and the reconciliation of family and work commitments. The changes in family structure have catapulted grandparents' rights to the fore with an emphasis on access to grandchildren. Gender is a key issue in the sociology of grandparenting. There is evidence of the bias towards maternal grandparents over paternal grandparents especially in lone parent families and following divorce. The feelings of grandparents and their transition into grandparenthood are key aspects in the study of aging. This proves that research on grandparenting in Ireland is necessary

Chapter Three: Literature Review – Contemporary Society

Introduction

An overview of the literature relating to issues within contemporary society that influences grandparenting is contained in this chapter. The changes in demographics, family and gender issues suggest topics that are relevant and influencing to grandparents and their grandparenting role. The remaining sections on older people, aging and self identity show how aging is constructed in contemporary society and how perhaps there is new era of analysing and constructing self identity. This notion of self identity connects to the roles grandparents choose to enact as grandparents.

Contemporary Ireland – changing demographics

An overview of Irish demographics is important in discussing grandparenting in contemporary Ireland. It provides a framework in considering contemporary Irish families, the lives of older people, intergenerational relations and Irish society. The exploration of grandparenting is beneficial in understanding the lives of grandparents themselves and their families, where they carry out the grandparenting role. The demographics of the Irish people have changed along similar lines as most western countries although there are a few nuances, which are specific to the Irish case.

The industrial revolution and modernisation have radically changed the living conditions and lifestyles of people living in western society. People are expected to live longer than any previous generation ever have before. Grandchildren may now have four living grandparents and grandparents are now more likely than ever to see their grandchildren become adults. Most recent figures for Ireland state that the life expectancy in 2001 at birth is 75.1 years for males and 80.3 years for females (www.cso.ie/newsevents/pr_lifetable0103.htm). The decreased mortality rates have resulted in a changing profile of western countries. Changing demographic trends have resulted in “a very large increase in the proportion of older people in the industrialised countries” (Giddens 1993, p.612). The Irish Census 2006 preliminary report press release highlights the increase in the percentage of older people in Ireland. “The number of persons aged 65 and over has increased at every census since 1961 from 315,000 in that year to 468,000 in 2006. This category now represents 11 per cent of the total population.” (CSO 2007, p.1)

This changed demographic profile of Ireland and most western societies is not solely due to the decreased mortality rates. Low fertility rates have further impacted on western societies including Ireland having an older age profile. The percentage rate of births per 1,000 of the population in 2006 was 15.2% compared to 21.4% in 1950 (www.cso.ie/statistics/bthsdthmarriages.htm). As Fahey and Russell's *'Family Formation: Trends, Data, Needs and Implications'* (2001) points out, Ireland followed along the same lines of change as other western societies but there are some differences in the Irish case. Fertility rates have decreased but the low fertility rate has plateaued in Ireland. "Irish fertility now lies below but closer to the more vibrant fertility levels of the United States and New Zealand than to the EU average" (Fahey and Russell 2001, p.19). The fact that Ireland has low fertility rates but that comparatively Ireland has better fertility rates than many other countries is further reflected in Lundström's research where the grandparents in her study "have, on average, 10 grandchildren, which is somewhat larger than those in a previous study and considerably more than grandparents in the UK and the US" (Lundström 2001, p.3).

The low fertility rates reflect the changing lifestyles of those living in contemporary societies and particularly the changes that have occurred in women's lives. It is no longer necessary as it was in pre-industrial society to have a large number of children. Children were needed for economical reasons before industrialisation to aid the family in earning a living, primarily in agriculture. Women's equal rights and increased participation in the workforce have made the traditional roles of men and women obsolete. Women are no longer expected that they can only be housewives and that men are the sole earners. Women are having children at a later age than previous generations, which is a reflection on the changing attitudes and societal expectations placed on women in current times. The average age of a mother when their first child is born has risen from 28.8 in 1980 to 31.0 in 2006 (www.cso.ie/statistics/avgagemotherbymaritalstatus.htm).

Women and men are also marrying at a later age.

"The average age of grooms in 2005 was 33.1 years, compared with 32.5 years in 2002 and 30.2 years in 1996. The pattern for brides is similar with the average age increasing from 28.4 years in 1996 to 31 years in 2005" (CSO 2007, p.1).

This is again a reflection of changing attitudes and societal expectations on the life course. There is a greater emphasis placed on third level education and focusing on a career path whereas in previous generations the emphasis was getting married and having a family. The

lessening of the Catholic Church's influence in Irish society is another influencing factor, as it is not considered necessary to have children born in wedlock as it was in the past. There is a growing section of the population who choose to never get married and remain in a committed cohabiting relationship. The introduction of divorce in Ireland in 1996 has influenced Irish families as couples divorce, remarry and form blended families consisting of step-family members. "There were 2,112 marriages involving at least one divorced person in 2005, including 420 marriages where both parties were divorced"(CSO 2007, p.3).

It must be noted that Ireland was relatively late introducing divorce compared to most other western societies. This is another nuance in the slightly different path that Ireland took in recent decades compared with other western countries. This look at Irish demographics has aided in setting the scene of contemporary Irish society and will allow for an examination of how these demographic changes have come about and the resulting impact on Irish families.

Family Change and Changing Gender Roles in Ireland.

The rapid and numerous changes experienced by Ireland like most western societies in the twentieth century have transformed Irish families and Irish society. In order to fully contemplate grandparenting in contemporary Ireland, these changes must be investigated. It has been discussed in the previous section how most western societies experienced rapid change in the twentieth century that included low fertility rates, low mortality rates, increased female participation in the labour market, increase in divorce and the emergence of diversity in family types. All aspects of 20th century western societies were changing due to the impact of industrialisation and capitalism. Sociology was prompted by this to develop new theoretical perspectives in an attempt to explain these societal changes. The construction of the modern western family by sociologists described what was considered as the standard family. The modern family was a small nuclear unit, of husband, wife and a small number of children that was based on the social – emotional and economic functioning of the family in the context of society as a whole. Talcott Parsons was particularly associated with the functionalist approach and viewed that the family roles required the following regulating norms

“...Marriage between adult partners...superiority of the conjugal bond...fulfilment of marriage bond through raising legitimate children, co-residence, the employment of one or more adult members outside the home, the unrestricted sharing of incomes...”(Cheal 1999, p.59).

Although modernisation or functionalist theories are limited in their analysis as they focus on this standard modern family and do not leave scope for diverse family forms, they point to the influence of economic roles within the family, the change in family patterns and the change in ideals regarding marriage. The influence of economic roles within the family refers to the change in the gender division of labour with “the issue of the working wives” (Finch and Summerfield 1999, p.15). The clearly defined roles of men as the breadwinner and women as housewives weakened due to women entering the labour force which in turn affected the roles within the family and prompted the sharing of resources.

The ideal of the companionate marriage is “...one of the key shifts from the idea of marriage as an institution to marriage as a relationship” (Finch and Summerfield 1999, p.13). The companionate marriage shows how the structure of marriage changed in 20th century western societies. Marriages were entered into for very different reasons than before that mainly concerned and centred on the individual’s needs. This new ideal of marriage as fulfilling the two individual needs of those within the marriage in a framework of egalitarianism is underpinned by the increasing emphasis on the individual in society. The foundation of marriages was now built on the separate individual needs as opposed to the collective needs of the family. This changing structure of marriage and the changing attitudes of society meant that it became socially acceptable to divorce for reason such that ones individual needs were not being fulfilled. The English report of the Royal Commission on Marriage and Divorce 1955 reinforces this by stating, “Weighing all evidence before us, we are satisfied that marriages are now breaking up which in the past would be held together” (Finch and Summerfield 1999, p.29).

The increase in divorce, the separation of sex from marriage, and the emergence of alternative family forms such as lone-parents, cohabiting childless couples and step-families prompted sociologists to reject the standard modern family form. They began to realise as Katja Boh highlights when “she states that the only common feature in the evolution of family life patterns ... is convergence to diversity” (Cheal 1999, p.60). The post-modernist perspective developed to explain these varying family forms asserts that the family is no longer one single type but families are diverse and people may move from one family form to another.

It is important to consider the Irish case because there is uniqueness in Ireland as to how family changes occurred compared in other western countries. The bottoming out of Irish fertility rates, as indicated earlier may be due to the strong influence of the Catholic Church in Irish society until recent times. The value placed on having children and the prominence placed on family in society still linger in Irish society. This is significant for the study of grandparenting in contemporary Ireland. It has been shown that in Lundström's (2001) study the grandparents have more grandchildren than in other western countries.

The emergence of lone parents, increase in divorce and unmarried couples are all found in contemporary western societies. There has been an increase in lone parenthood in Ireland in the recent decades but

“There are significant differences in the count of lone parent families between Census and survey data in the one hand and social welfare data on the other, in that the latter point to a substantially higher incidence of lone parent families” (Fahey and Russell 2001, p.66).

This is reflective of the eligibility criteria for lone parent benefits, insofar as you must not be living with your partner to be eligible. Therefore it is possible that in some instances a person may identify themselves as a lone parent but they are not parenting alone. O'Connor (1998) sees the emergence of women as lone parents as reflecting “...the ability of women to survive on their own, and their willingness to redefine the family, excluding a residential heterosexual tie as the basic element in that unit”(O'Connor 1998, p.119). There is certainly a case to make to disagree with O'Connor's perspective. This stance places an overriding emphasis on the woman's choice or influence on becoming a lone parent. It leaves little space for the understanding of the constructing and indeed breakdown of relationships in contemporary society based on both men and women's perspectives.

The changes in women's roles most importantly their increased participation in the labour market have had a major impact on family life. Women can now parent alone, work full time and be a full time mother. It has left the position of men in the family, their role in the family and in society very ambiguous. It seems that in some cases men have swapped places with women and are marginalised from some aspects of family life. Mothers are nearly always if not always included in the discussion of their children's lives and childcare issues whereas men are often excluded when such topics are discussed. It seems in contemporary society many mothers are now taking on the traditional breadwinner role but there is a hesitation of men to take on the homemaker or nurturing role. It is often assumed that young men who

become fathers or fathers who are not in a relationship with their child's mother are not interested in being part of their child's life. Ferguson and Hogan in their study of fatherhood reiterated this by stating "...it should be obvious (though it is not) that the inclusion of men's voices is essential to constructing a complete picture of the meanings and practices of fatherhood" (2004, p.41).

The level of divorce in Ireland is relatively low compared to other western societies. Divorce was only introduced in Ireland in 1996, considerably later than other western societies. Irish people are not divorcing at the rate expected when divorce was introduced; in fact more and more Irish people are getting married. The marriage rates from the Central Statistics Office show that the rate of marriage in Ireland has been increasing since the late 1990s. (www.cso.ie/statistics/bthsdthsmarriages.htm) This is a statistic that seems at loggerheads with the emergence of unmarried couples with children in contemporary Ireland.

"The rise in non-marital fertility, therefore, does not entail as radical a move away from marriage as might first appear, but it does imply a change in the sequencing and significance of marriage in family formation" (Fahey and Russell 2001, p.20).

There has been a shift away from the notion that there is a social perquisite that you must marry before you have children.

"...the changes in social behaviour that have occurred in Ireland in recent decades, particularly as a result of the increased availability and use of contraceptives and the large-scale changes that have taken place in the economic, political and cultural sphere" (Crisis Pregnancy 2005, p.7).

This of course has major implications for the Irish Constitution, which upholds a definition of the family based on marriage. "The State pledges itself to guard with special care the institution of Marriage, on which the Family is founded, and to protect it against attack" (The Constitution of Ireland, Article 41.3.1).

These issues have formed a new concept of what a family is, entails and the family issues in contemporary Ireland. Family change has an impact on all members of contemporary families perhaps even more so on grandparents as family life today is vastly different from family life they have experience in the past. These changes are not isolated within the family but reflect the overall changes in Irish society, particularly regarding gender roles. The increased emphasis on the individual in modern society will be teased out in a later section that will

examine the new concepts of individualism, self-reflection and ongoing personal development.

Older People and Aging

In this study of grandparenting in contemporary Ireland it is vital to portray the issues relating to older people and aging. By its very nature becoming a grandparent means a transition into the older if not the oldest generation in the family. This has impacted not only at an individual level but also in many aspects of society. A comprehensive view of grandparenting needs to consider current issues for older people. By doing this, the occurrence of grandparents who may not be deemed as 'old' is not being ignored but rather there is an acknowledgement of how issues relating to older people and aging are closely linked to the study of grandparents. If we consider the place of older people in our society and how we view aging in our society, it will help in understanding the place of grandparents within their own family units and in the wider society.

Older people and aging can be looked at from a sociological perspective and from a social policy viewpoint. The sociological perspective explored here will focus on how aging is constructed in current times, attitudes to aging, the values associated with older people and where older people are placed in society. Social policies directly relating to older people, for example pensions and long term care will be considered along with those indirectly linked to older people such as education. It should be noted that a large amount of literature on aging and older people is deficit based. This can lead to a negative portrayal of aging. This literature review aims to highlight this discrepancy with the contesting of negative perspectives and the inclusion of positive aging literature.

It can be seen that the social policies developed for older people in recent decades will reflect how society views aging and older people and similarly how social policies can influence thought on older people and aging. The changing demographic trends in most developed countries, particularly the increase in life expectancy and low fertility rates has prompted much emphasis on the increase in proportion of older people. This emphasis tends to take the shape of terminology such as “ ‘the population time bomb’ meaning that it will become ever more difficult to provide income to a growing proportion of retired persons in the population”(Stewart 2005, p.10).

The predictions of how these demographic changes will affect our society have been quite definite in heralding the demise of the welfare system as it buckles under the pressure of sustaining the huge numbers of older people. The impact on social policies and political ideologies will be closely considered at a later stage. For now the focus will be on how we view aging and older people in our society in the light of current demographic changes.

The increase in life expectancy can be viewed on a macro social level as we witness the increase in older people in our society, the change in family structure as the 'beanpole' family emerges and the increase in number of life stages. The 'beanpole' family refers to a family in which one is more likely to have relations above and below their generation as opposed to in the same generation. This means a person will have less brothers, sisters and cousins (the same generation) and have more grandparents, aunts, uncles, nephews and nieces (different generations). This is a result of the low level of fertility rates as previously discussed. Brannen, Moss and Mooney (2004) indicate that the importance of the relationships between the generations of this 'beanpole family' have increased not only due to changing demographics but through necessity. This relates to the how ties can be often weakened in the middle and younger generations by divorce and separation and with needs of maintaining the work-life balance. It is also important to consider this on an individual or micro social level as we consider how increased life expectancy; contemporary views on aging and attitudes to older people affect the individual. It must be acknowledged that older people are not a homogenous group but it is possible to talk broadly of older people on a whole and then be specific for certain issues which may only effect older people due to their gender, class or ethnicity.

There have been vast changes experienced by developed countries through the last century and it seems certain to continue in this century. These changes can be considered on a macro social or wider scale. Families are now likely to take the 'beanpole' family type with more family members above and below your age than those on the same level. Therefore, a child is more likely to have grandparents and even great grandparents than to have numerous siblings. It also means as indicated in the section on family change, that children will more than ever before have their parents and grandparents well into adulthood. This will certainly affect intergenerational relations and is the main reason why it has been argued for the necessity of this study on grandparenting.

It is not only within the sphere of the family that the changing age profile has had an impact. Much literature acknowledges that with the emergence of the theory of life stages, contemporary societies are more age aware and age segregated. This does not only relate to older people. In pre-industrial times, children went straight from childhood to adulthood and there was no life stage 'adolescence' as there is in modern times. Featherstone and Wernick refer to how Hareven explains

"...as greater differentiation in stages of life began to develop, social and economic functions became more closely related to age, and ages of family members became more streamlined, a greater segregation between age groups emerged" (Featherstone and Wernick 1995, p.130).

In modern society the personal development does not stop on reaching adulthood. Many new ideals and concepts have appeared in contemporary society to a much greater extent than ever before. These new ideals and concepts have been apparent in the discussion on family change and changing gender roles where personal needs and individualism have taken a central role in society. Lifestyle, continuous personal development and self- reflection are common concepts in current times. These will be discussed at a later stage but it is important to acknowledge now that these concepts influence issues relating to older people and aging.

"Dependency is one of the words closely associated in the public mind with old age. The image of older people becoming like children – dependent on able-bodied adults – and the loss of mental faculties, are other stereotypes which have wide currency" (Bond, Coleman and Peace (eds) 2001, p.255).

This dependency usually relates to the younger generation looking after the older generation. This of course happens but it has been shown in some studies that it can often be the reverse where the older generation supports the younger one.

In many studies of grandparenting and grandparents, the older generation have been portrayed as providing financial, childcare and emotional support to their grandchildren. Harris reiterates that "...contrary to what most people believe, regardless of class, the direction of financial assistance most frequently flows from parents to children than in the reverse direction" (Harris 1990, p.249). In the current climate of house prices in Ireland, it has certainly been indicated that older generations often provide financial assistance by giving a young couple the deposit money to buy a house.

This emphasis placed on older people as dependent on younger generations or on society as a whole is key in the exploration of aging and older people in contemporary societies. It must be explored why there is an 'infantalisation' whereby older people are considered to be like

children, dependent, unable to make their own life decisions regardless if they are ill or not. Older people are displayed as one homogeneous group who are ill, frail and dependent. This is certainly not the case in reality, as in Ireland a relatively low percentage of older people need full time care. “In 2003, 4.8 per cent of older Irish people were in long-stay care” (NCAOP 2005, p.17).

This negative view of older people and the aging process or ageism itself may be linked through the capitalist system whereby older people are retired, not contributing to the productivity of a society and are therefore pulling or draining the resources of the society.

“The characterisation of the aged as ‘useless’, ‘inefficient’, ‘unattractive’, ‘temperamental’ and ‘senile’ accompanied by the gradual ousting of people from the labour force at age 65, since the beginning of the twentieth century”(Featherstone and Wernick 1990, p.131).

A one-dimensional view of the contribution of older people in society is reinforced here. The focus is on the dependency of older people and not their contribution to society. The many older people caring for their spouses or relatives or by providing financial and emotional support for their family are forgotten. The aging process and old age are considered negatively in a person’s life course compared to the way society views young people and children. This again may stem from a capitalist scenario where children and young people will be the workforce of tomorrow and productive. Therefore, children and young people represent the bright future for society whereas older people are a burden on society. “We emphasise youthfulness and the energy of youth. The process of modernisation and technological innovation render the skills and knowledge of older generations redundant” (Bond, Coleman and Peace (eds) 2001, p.347).

These attitudes towards aging and older people influence the lives of older people. Older people as a group are often pointed to as a risk group for poverty. These negative attitudes can often have a limiting effect on an individual level. An individual might feel that by aging they are no longer able or even socially allowed to partake in certain task because ‘they are too old’. Every individual with the increased possibility of living into their seventies must consider what will happen when they retire, when their children leave home and the prospect especially for women of widowhood. The future looks very bleak if as people age these negative views of aging and older people in society as discussed could impact on an individual’s life choices as they get older.

However, many commentators including Bytheway (1995) in his works on ageism suggest that there must be a move towards positive thinking on ageing and society's back must be turned on these limiting ideologies. Internationally the United Nations (UN) and nationally the National Council on Ageing and Older People (NCAOP) have promoted healthy attitudes towards aging and older people. The UN International Year of Older Persons was in 1999 and in 2002 The Second World Assembly on Ageing was convened by the UN in Madrid. The UN principles for older persons include independence, participation, care, self-fulfilment and dignity of older people. The NCAOP's report '*An Age Friendly Society. A Position Statement*' can be seen to further encourage these principles. "An age-integrated society is characterised by relationships of reciprocity, solidarity and equity between the generations" (NCAOP 2005, p.21).

It is certain that the approaches adopted here can only be beneficial for contemporary societies. It is necessary to keep to the forefront that the changing demographics resulting in an older age profile of most western societies including Ireland is a current issue, which needs to be addressed, not ignored.

An important aspect of increased life expectancy is that there is a marked difference between the life expectancy of men and women. This will result in a high level of women in older age groups. As women generally are more likely to be in poverty than men this will have major social implications. Norman suggests that due to inequalities not only in relation to older people but gender, class and ethnicity, "...described (as) the triple jeopardy of old age to refer to the position of elderly, black women in British society" (Bond, Coleman and Peace (eds) 2001, p.342). The ageist views of older people and aging seem to be even more negative for women than for men. Women are often portrayed as silly, daft, lacking mental agility compared to the wise, mischievous man. Women must strive to maintain the looks of their youth. The number of anti-ageing cosmetic products advertised reinforces this ideal of women never growing old. There is nothing wrong with anti-ageing products as such but it is when they are seen to be unrealistic about the aging process of the human body that the danger occurs. Having considered aging and older people from a sociological perspective, it has been displayed that although there is a promotion of healthy attitudes to aging, that much thought in society is negative and very much caught up in the dependency levels of older people.

It is important to explore how social policy deals with the issues of aging and older people. This may be achieved by looking at current political ideology, current debates on the future of the welfare states and the influences of international organisations such as the UN and the EU. The Irish case will be examined in relation to these discussions and with emphasis on key social policies that illustrate the place of older people in Irish society such as the pension system and the nursing home subvention scheme. The interest in the aging population and the increase in the number of older people due to demographic changes have been outlined. The welfare states including Ireland have not been blind to these changes and the effect that it will have in the future for social policies. The Second World Assembly on Ageing, convened by the UN in Madrid has been discussed. The European Union has not missed the significance of these demographic changes. The Green Paper '*Confronting demographic change: a new solidarity between the generations*' is just one example of the discussions on Europe's aging society. The paper centres on concerns for dependency ratios. "It is hard to imagine how our continent will maintain economic growth without a growing population – 'a growth without cradles'" (European Commission 2005, p.3).

Often discussions focus on the dependency ratio and the threat to pension systems and forget about other equally important issues such as a healthy attitude to aging and older people, promoting healthy lifestyles among older people and their citizen rights. Much of the current literature and commentary on the future of the welfare state relates to the growing demand on welfare states to support their older population. This is generally seen as a burden on the welfare system with some even heralding it as the cause of the demise of the welfare state as we know it. The emergence of the Third Way as a new political ideology claiming to go beyond right and left ideologies has promoted the reduction of public expenditure. Blair's New Labour Party is the main promoter of this third way ideology with slogans such as 'workfare not welfare' and 'hand up not hand out'. It is evident not only in Blair's third way but in many other countries that there is an encroachment on public expenditure. This has an impact on pension systems of welfare states as the private pensions are promoted and the development of public pensions is ceased. This may be seen as reflective of the current thinking on dependency ratios and an attempt to save the welfare state from the pressure of the pension system on the public expenditure. It has been noted already that there is especially in Ireland some suggestions that the older population will not place such a burden, as the level of immigrant workers and the bottoming out of fertility rates will counterbalance the dependency ratio.

“Estes (1986) has argued that this ideology, in support of advanced industrial capitalism, uses the negative attitudes of society toward elderly people to justify the reduction in public expenditure and at the same time reinforces these negative attitudes by blaming demographic changes for increased public expenditure” (Bond, Coleman and Peace (eds) 2001, p.344).

The promotion of private pensions to decrease public expenditure is the main solution offered. “By and large, it has been accepted that the future lies with private pensions” (Stewart (ed) 2005, p.11). This not only further embeds the ideology of older people as a burden but it has a major impact on the poverty levels of older people as a group. The improvement and widening of public pension systems may be seen as necessary to counteract the income depravity experienced by many older people. “...pensions are currently widening income inequality in Irish society and leaving a large proportion of pensioners (particularly women) without adequate income in their old age” (Stewart (ed) 2005, p.11).

On an individual level, the promotion of private pensions will have a major impact on those less well off. The fact that women are living longer than men and are generally more likely to be living on the poverty line is of major concern. This policy will surely increase the risk level of older people to be living in poverty. It also reinforces the negative attitudes towards aging. Older people are portrayed as a burden, a threat to the economy and working of the state and this will surely affect individuals self worth and value.

The increase demand on the health service, as the number of older people increase is another main area in social policy covered in literature on the future of the welfare state. As has already been noted, the percentage of older people needed full twenty-four hour care is very low but we have seen how this reality has been eschewed into a perception of old age as a time of illness and dependency. These discussions have naturally impacted on Ireland and there is the thinking in line with much of the literature that we must brace ourselves to cope with the level of older people in our country. The most significant indicator of a reaction to this is the introduction of a social policy relating to long-term health care. “The main focus here is on the provision of care services for older people as population ageing will be the main source of increased demand for these services” (Timonen and McMenamin 2002, p.20).

The Nursing Home Subvention Scheme is a social policy, which deals with the payment of the cost of long-term care by the patient. It can involve the cost of the care being taken out of the patients’ estate when they die. Many commentators and advocates for older people have

slated this policy as disgraceful and institutionally ageist. They argue that a younger person who is in need of long-term care will not have to pay for it purely because of their age. This is again, reflective of the place of older people in society and the burden they are perceived to be.

It would be unbalanced to suggest that there are no positive policies relating to older people within Irish social policies. Free travel on public transport, fuel allowances, free telephone line rental and many more policies can only be held as positives and perhaps reflect the reality of how many older people struggle to support themselves. The recent protests by older people over the withdrawal of the free medical card for over-70s displayed how older people are now a mobilised group who can certainly highlight issues that affect them. Bond, Coleman and Peace (eds) (2001) suggest that social policies which are generally seen, as having little to do with aging are ones that need to be incorporated into a positive view of aging. For example, education policy which could provide courses for older people which would encourage mental agility, allow individuals to pursue education that they may not have been able to do earlier on in life and reflect the current need of the economy to have up to date skills. It seems vital to integrate aging and issues relating to older people in all sections of the education system to promote positive views aging and older people. “Human ageing should be taught from a historical, cross-cultural and multidisciplinary perspective”(Bond, Coleman and Peace (eds) (2001) , p.345).

Most developed countries will experience great demographic changes in the future, which will create societies with larger proportions of older people and where children will be more likely than ever to have all their grandparents and even great-grandparents alive. Grandparents themselves will experience the aging process and old age as never before due to our increased life expectancy. It has been shown how this demographic change has already started to impact on social policies as catastrophic predictions of the welfare state have been formulated. Each individual not just older people but all individuals must consider how society should treat older people and their place in society. The promotion of positive aging viewpoints and anti-ageist policies can only be viewed positively. Older people have much to offer society; the contribution many older people make by providing care for spouses or relatives and to the wider society should be acknowledged. Therefore, while not ignoring the new challenges for society, as there is an increasing proportion of older people, society must refrain from seeing only the negative ‘burden’ of older people. This research on

grandparenting will provide an avenue in which positive views of aging, older people and their roles in society can be presented.

Self –Identity: The Modern Search for Meaning to Life.

The distinct feature of modern society to focus on the individual, personal development, lifestyle and self-identity has been referred to in previously. It is important to focus on the construction of these concepts, as it will provide understanding to individual's lives in contemporary society. This will then provide a greater understanding to family life, intergenerational relations and grandparenting. This relates to how self identity can influence the roles and meaning of grandparenting. The classification of grandparent types both in Ireland and internationally (Lundström 2001; Neugarten and Weinstein 1964), their choice or rejection by individual grandparents could be explained by this contemporary notion of self identity.

Giddens (1991) proposes that in modern society there are more choices and a diversity of life paths or lifestyles to choose. This has been portrayed in the changing in gender roles particularly for women and in the increase in the emphasis on the individual in modern society. “The ‘art of being in the now’ generates the self-understanding necessary to plan ahead and to construct a life trajectory which accords with the individual's inner wishes” (Giddens 1991, p.71).

Giddens points to the phenomenon of the autobiography in modern societies as way in which an individual can provide a narrative to their self-identity. This means that an individual can review their life, the major points in the past and thus plan for the future or establish what they wish for the future.

“The self forms a trajectory of development from the past to the anticipated future. The individual appropriates his past by sifting through it in the light of what is anticipated for an (organised) future. The trajectory of the self has a coherence that derives from a cognitive awareness of the various phases of the lifespan” (Giddens 1991, p.75).

In order to fully understand the motivations and life choices of individuals in society it is beneficial to be mindful of the framework in which many life decisions are made in contemporary society. Whereas in the past life plans and lifestyles were followed as a matter of tradition or social perquisite. Therefore older people, grandparents in this study may be a unique group to study in modern society as they may have grown up where life choices were

followed as a matter of tradition and now live in a society where life choices are made based on a greater emphasis on the individual. Their children, the middle generation of this study will have also been aware of these modern concepts and so the interaction between the two generations may provide insight into the views of each generation on these modern concepts of self-identity and lifestyle. Further these notions of lifestyle and self identity could underline preference of roles in grandparenting and the meanings that grandparents attached to their grandparent role.

Conclusion

Contemporary society and contemporary living has evolved with marked differences in demographics, family types and gender roles. People are living longer, becoming and being grandparents for longer than ever before. The changes in gender roles means that many women are working mothers and many men are more involved in rearing their children than in previous generations. The issues of aging and old age may be more relevant to today's people due to demographic changes. Contemporary living involves the formation and reformation of self-identity, which has shifted from the concept of life being based on social prerequisites. The topics covered in this literature review not only allow for a presentation of the environment experienced by grandparents in contemporary Ireland. They allow for an insight into the reasons for the various grandparent roles, the challenges, issues and meanings attached to grandparenting and the complexities of contemporary family life.

Chapter Four: Methodology

Introduction

This study aimed to explore the experiences of grandparenting in contemporary Ireland. There was a set of four key objectives that the research was based upon. The key objectives were:

1. To carry out a literature review of the sociology of grandparenting focusing on sources from America, Australia and Britain.
2. To conduct a literature review of the changing nature of grandparenting in Ireland.
3. To develop a methodology using interviews with three generations based on the life course research methods.
4. To honour the voice of all family members including children and older people.

Qualitative semi-structured interviews were used. Interviews were carried out (where possible) with a member of each of the three generations within one family. Namely: grandparent, daughter/son and grandchild. This strategy was purposefully used in a two-pronged approach. Firstly, to provide a full perspective of grandparenting from each generation. This was considered necessary because grandparenting is an intergenerational relationship. Secondly and key to this research was to interview children and thus provide a place for the child's voice within the realm of research. Primarily the interviews were carried out on an individual basis but two families wished to be interviewed together in communal interviews. Communal interviews although challenging were embraced due to the preference of accommodating participants where possible and for the beneficial data the communal interviews provided.

The research was carried out in Carlow town and its surrounding hinterland. This provided the researcher with immediate access to both urban and rural families as well as a diversity of participants from varying socio-economic backgrounds. A total of seven families were interviewed. This included 22 participants ranging in age from 8 to 77.

The Ethics Committee of the Waterford Institute of Technology approved the research. The research was carried out within the Centre for Social and Family Research WIT, which have

been at the forefront of family research specifically involving children. (Nolan 2007, Hogan and O'Reilly 2007). The supervisor of the research was Fergus Hogan.

Key Research Approaches

The purpose of the study was investigative in nature because there has been little research solely about grandparenting in Ireland. The research design and data collection methods chosen had to reflect and enable this investigative task. A flexible research design was adopted. A flexible research design must not be confused with research that lacks goals or poorly organised research. "...in these designs you don't have to foreclose on options about methods. Ideas for changing your approach may arise from your involvement and early data collection" (Robson 2004, p.165).

This flexible approach made it possible to carry out the main aim of the study; to explore grandparenting in contemporary Ireland. This approach is reflected in grounded theory methods. Grounded theory allows the researcher to enter into data collection with an open mind, limiting preconceptions. Therefore, issues that arise in early data collection that were not foreseen may be further investigated and incorporated into future data collection. "The flexibility of qualitative research permits you to follow leads that emerge. Grounded theory methods increase this flexibility and simultaneously give you more focus than many methods" (Charmaz 2006, p.14).

For example, the issue of Information Communication Technology (ICT) and the generation gap between grandparents and grandchildren was brought up in the primary interviews of this study. The inclusion of this topic by the researcher in subsequent interviews allowed for a thorough analysis of the issue.

Why use semi-structured qualitative interviews?

Every researcher must account for their choices in research methods and state plainly why they deem the methods used are the most appropriate for their research. The reason for using qualitative methods and for not using quantitative methods in this research does not confirm one method superior to the other. It is a recognition that qualitative semi-structured interviews provided the data needed in this instance. "The key here is providing a detailed

description of the research setting and methods so that applicability can be determined by those reading the research account” (O’Leary 2005, p.70).

The justifications for using semi-structured qualitative interviews are certainly reflected in the interpretive paradigm. However, the way in which participants would most likely impart the data required can be further explained through a thorough examination of semi-structured qualitative interviews and later in the interpretive paradigm and life course methods.

The difference between qualitative research and quantitative research is often described in an arbitrary way; that qualitative research is research with small groups of people about specific topics whereas quantitative research is carried out on a variety of topics with large amounts of people. Although there is some truth in this statement it can often result in the conclusion that quantitative research is all about statistics and that qualitative research is not reliable. On the contrary quantitative research can provide more than just statistical information and qualitative research does provide reliable and valid research.

Semi-structured qualitative interviews enabled this research to hear in-depth accounts from participants about grandparenting in their lives. The semi-structured interview has a balance between an informal chat and a purposeful conversation. Topic guides (See Appendix A) and sample questions were developed for this research to act as a pointer for the researcher and the participant to the issues, which could be discussed in the interview. However, there was no prescribed way (that would be found in much quantitative research) that issues should be asked about or in what order they could be discussed. Therefore, all issues in the topic guides were covered where applicable but the informal nature of the interview was promoted. This was used as a tool to allow the participant to tell their own story in their own way, which is part of the life course method, and also to make the participant feel as comfortable as possible.

Finding a Research Position for this Study

The epistemological background for this research was interpretivism. Epistemology, used here, refers to the theory of knowledge that has been followed in this research. The theory of knowledge thus acts as a foundation on which to base the research. Symbolic interactionism is part of an interpretive paradigm that is strongly tied to qualitative research. This

interpretative paradigm is widely used in social research when carrying out qualitative interviews and field studies.

Symbolic interactionism looks on the social world as having a dynamic relationship between social actors and the social world. Social actors are not merely responsive to the stimulus around them by a knee-jerk reaction. Social actors interpret their actions through the interaction between other social actors and the social world. Therefore, roles are situated in a 'meaningful world' and can be defined and changed in accordance to this interpretation. "This perspective assumes that the interaction is inherently dynamic and interpretive and addresses how people create, enact and change meanings and actions" (Charmaz 2006, p.7).

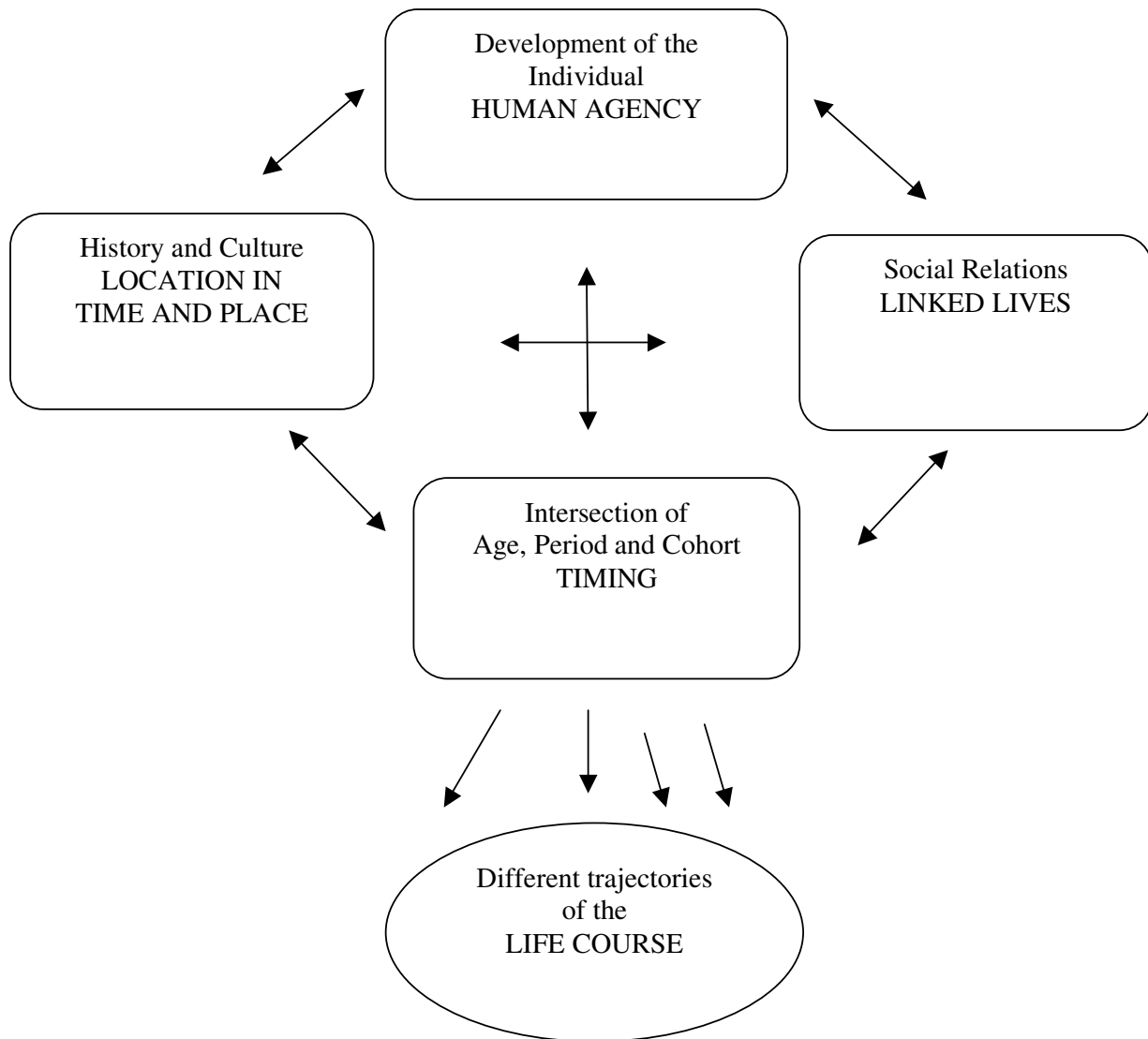
This epistemology links to qualitative research and in this study qualitative interviews. The use of qualitative interviews allows the participants to tell how grandparenting occurs in their own lives, their interpretations of it, their actions regarding it and how they see grandparenting in Irish society. The life course and life history approach was deemed particularly appropriate in the research approach of this study. This is due to the informal nature of semi-structured qualitative interviews which allows the participant tell their own life story (life history) and the ability to view the relationship between the individual and the social world in the life course research methods.

Life course research methods

The life course method was largely drawn upon in this research. The life course method relates to research that asks about a participant's life history or life story.

"The life course model draws on the two main traditions in social science-one focusing on the ecological and "age norm" context surrounding the individual, the other focusing on the longitudinal trajectory connecting roles and events in a person's life over time"(Giele and Elder (eds)1998, p.12).

Figure 1: Giele and Elder's (eds) (1998) 'Four Key Elements of the Life Course Paradigm'.



The above diagram displays the four key elements that shape the life course according to Giele and Elder (eds) (1998). These are:

1. The historical and geographical location
2. Linked lives
3. Human agency
4. Variations in timing.

Therefore when using semi-structured interviews to obtain data about the participants' experiences of grandparenting each of these four elements are present. The participant provides a narrative, a life history (human agency) in which they discuss the three other elements. For example; a grandparent may start to talk about their own childhood and family background (the historical and geographical location), talk about their relationships with family members and others (linked lives) and the reasoning or experiences of certain roles or meaningful events in their lives (timing).

This can then be used by the researcher to analyse and investigate family changes, societal changes and in certain cases what makes a certain individual's life course differ from another. Perhaps essentially in this study is that previous multi-generational research has "...made clear that "grandparent" generations differed a great deal from each other as well as from "parent" and "grandchild" generations" (Giele and Elder (eds)1998, p.23).

Sources of data

This research was purposefully carried out in Carlow and its hinterland. Carlow was deemed to provide a readily available mixture of rural and urban families. Thus providing the study with a blend of families from different socio-economic backgrounds. "County Carlow's population is 52,500 (2008) – an increase of 6,468 between 2002 and 2008 – over 14% increase from the Census 2002 and ahead of the national average, 10%" (Carlow County Council 2008). The population has seen a growth in both urban and rural areas but Carlow Town accounted for 40% of the total population growth (Carlow County Council 2008). The increase in rates of net migration and increase of commuters are considered central factors to the population growth.

"The County has experienced a rapid population expansion over the past decade, in part due to its location on the periphery of the Greater Dublin Area, within commuting distance of large employment centres on the outskirts of Dublin City" (Carlow County Council 2008).

Just over 28% of the population of Carlow are under the age of 19 and 10.5% are aged 65 and over (CSO 2006). There is evidence of the increase of separation and instance of divorce in Carlow from '*The Census 2006*', although the numbers are small due to divorce only being introduced in recent years.

The sampling strategy was a purposeful sample because there was a need for three members of three generations within one family to agree to participate. Flyers (See Appendix B) seeking participants for the study were placed in various locations in and around Carlow Town. Two community groups; a community centre in Carlow town and a grandparents group in a small village in Carlow County were contacted and asked to inform their clients of the study. However, the most effective method of getting participants was word of mouth and the snowballing effect that followed. 'Snowballing' refers to the method of asking participants if they will tell other possible participants about the study and participant recruitment is achieved in this manner.

There are some specific issues that arose in the recruitment of participants of the study. Due to the fact that participants were family members, it was often one family member that was made contact with in the first instance. The agreed participation of one family member did not mean that a family set finally participated. Often other family members did not agree to take part in the study. This happened on numerous occasions for varying reasons but there was a definite trend in the refusal of participating in the research. Often the first contact was with the middle generation who was willing to participate with their child and who would ask their parent (the grandparent generation) to take part with them. The grandparent often refused for varying reasons but there was a sense that the grandparent believed it was necessary to know the researcher or the researcher's family, particularly older relatives of the researcher in order to take part. There seemed to be a fear present of allowing a stranger into their homes to talk about family life. In one instance, the grandparent had an adult child with learning difficulties and they did not want the researcher "checking up" on the behaviour of this adult child. The task of getting participants was certainly a laborious one. However, once the participants had agreed fully to be in the study, they were very accommodating and anxious to give the researcher the information required.

The sample

The aim of this research was to conduct three interviews with a member of three generations within one family. This was altered during the data collection process. The challenge of getting three members from three generations within the one family was proving time consuming and at times fruitless. This was due to the fact as previously discussed that not all members of the family agreed. The limit on the age of a child who could participate also ruled out many families. It was deemed for ethically reasons not to interview any child who was not of school going age. The youngest child interviewed was aged 8. Therefore, in certain family sets not all generations are present. For instance, one family included two new grandparents whose son did not want to take part and whose granddaughter could not take part due to her age.

There were 22 participants in the study from 7 different families. There were 5 families living in urban areas and 2 families living in rural areas. They ranged from ages of 8 to 77. There were three generations interviewed in 5 of the families, one family with two generations (grandparents and children) and one family with one generation (grandparent generation).

Figure 2: Breakdown of Participant's Sample.

Generation	No.	Gender	Ages	Marital Status
Grandparents	10	7 female 3 male	50 to 77	9 married 1 widowed
Children	7	5 female 2 male	27 to 50	4 married 2 single 1 separated
Grandchildren	5	2 female 3 male	8 to 17	N/A

Sample of Grandparents

There were 10 grandparents in the study; 7 grandmothers and 3 grandfathers. Their ages ranged from 50 to 77. There were four grandparents who had only one grandchild. The others

had several grandchildren; one grandmother in her 70s had 22 grandchildren. The majority of the grandparents were employed with only two receiving the Old Age Pension. There was one widowed grandmother. The remaining grandparents were married.

Sample of Daughters and Sons

There were seven participants in this middle generation. There were 2 sons, 4 daughters and 1 daughter-in-law. They ranged in ages from 27 to 50. Four were married, two single and one separated participant in this sample. The vast majority of the sons/daughters were working with just one in full time education.

Sample of Grandchildren

There were five grandchildren in this study; three grandsons and two granddaughters. They ranged in ages from 8 to 17.

Observations on the sample

A comparative analysis of the marital status of the grandparent generation and their children's generation displays a change in the structure of today's families compared to those in the past. The grandparent generation were all married (there was one widow in the study) whereas even in this relatively small sample, their children have a variety of relationship types. This indicates a shift away from the perceived necessity of being married to have children that was present in the grandparent's generation. However, as Fahey and Russell (2001) ascertain it is not a complete turn away from marriage but rather an increase in flexibility and a change in sequence of marriage and child bearing. It could be described that there is a greater fluidity to marriage in current times than in the past. The values regarding marriage and the reasons to marry or not marry can vary from couple to couple.

There are more women in this study than men. There were 14 female participants and 8 male participants. The reasons for this may not be conclusive but certainly an evaluation of possible reasons for a lower participation by men is beneficial. It was women from all but one of the families that stated their interest in taking part in the study. In turn, there was an occurrence that the woman who stated her interest would then ask her mother or daughter to take part. This may be a result of women being the links between generations within families. This has been discussed in previous literature regarding matrilineal ties (Fingerman 2004, Barranti 1995). A mother-in-law and daughter-in-law in this study discussed how they felt

women were the ties to intergenerational relations, not only mothers and daughters but in their own case, mother-in-laws and daughter-in-laws. This excerpt is from an interview with Kathleen and her daughter-in-law Lisa. They agree that their relationship is a major influence for intergenerational relations

Interviewer: ... if ye didn't get on would that effect the relationship with your grandchildren?

Kathleen: Oh definitely I'd say so. Would you?

Lisa: Yeah because we wouldn't bother coming down and stuff.

Kathleen: Yeah.

Lisa: Because it really is...is the woman. It really is.

Kathleen: It is, yeah.

Lisa: It's not a bad thing to say about Brendan but if I didn't say will we go down to your mother's, he could leave it two weeks without coming down.

Kathleen: Yeah.

The gender of the researcher must be acknowledged as something that can be a factor of whether people agree or disagree to participate in a study. It would be naive to consider the female gender of the researcher not to have made an impact especially with a majority of female participants. This is not to say that male researchers cannot interview female participants and that as in the case of this research that a female researcher cannot interview male participants. It is an acknowledgement as Charmaz (2006) highlights that gender, age, race and class of both the researcher and the participant can influence whether a person wishes to participate and affect the interview that is conducted.

Methods of data collection

The qualitative interviews were semi-structured and thus guided by a set of general questions and topic guides (See Appendix A). Each interview was recorded with the consent from the interviewee. The interviews were conducted in a non-formal manner so as to put the participant at ease. That is to say while the interview was guided by a topic guide, the interviews were more conversational in nature. This conformed to grounded theory methods that aim to limit preconceptions of the interviewer and therefore providing as much scope as possible to allow the participant tell their own story.

Life histories

The life history paradigm within the life course methods (Giele and Elder (eds) 1998) seemed appropriate to study grandparenting. This method involves asking the participant (mainly the grandparent and child generations in this instance) about their roles, relationships and feelings about the past and present.

“To learn how a person sees the meaning of his or her life at any given time, it is necessary to secure a broad sampling of the person’s current views of self in various roles and relationships at that time and in the past.”(Giele and Elder (eds) 1998, p.197).

The interviewer asked and guided the participant to talk about their childhoods, the differences between society now and in the past and how they perceived childhoods today. This provided the interviewer with a perspective on not only the participant’s life and views but also essential data that with data analysis could provide insight into the roles and relationships a participant had taken on in current times. A grandparent often talked about their own childhood and their parenting when explaining what kind of a grandparent they wanted to be.

The family home environment

All interviews were carried out in the family home of the participants, mainly in the grandparents’ homes. The reasons given for the preference to the family home as opposed to neutral venues suggested by the researcher (community centres, hotel lobbies and parks) were mainly convenience and having someone to look after children while the adult interviews were being carried out.

The environment of the family home seemed to enhance the informal nature of the interviews by providing the participants with a setting that they were used to and comfortable with. There were some disturbances and interruptions while conducting some interviews because they were in the family home. For example, the phone was ringing and children were coming in and out to ask for different things. Although this was an inconvenience, it did not seem to hinder the interview process but rather provided the interviewer with an impression of family life and often allowed for some casual conversation, which often put the participant at ease.

The communal interview

There were two communal interviews carried out in this research. The researcher and supervisor had discussed prior to the data collection starting, the possibility of parents wanting to be present when the interviews with children were being conducted. It was decided that it was important that everyone participating was comfortable with the interview process especially with regard to interviewing children.

Two families expressed their preference of being interviewed together. This was allowed because the nature of the research did not dictate a need for private individual interviews. The researcher did prefer the one- to – one interview because it is easier than conducting communal interviews particularly with regard to making sure all topic areas are covered. However, the communal interviews have enhanced this research because they have given an account of how intergenerational relations occur in reality with the three generations being interviewed together.

The communal interview with one family included a grandfather and son. The communal interview helped to get both father's and son's narratives because the researcher was able to go between both father and son and ask what were their opinions on certain issues the other had raised. Ted, the grandfather talked about how children in current times do not have as much freedom and that some of their imagination is lost because of this. In the communal interview, the researcher was able to ask his son Brendan did he think the same way.

Ted: Or better. But eh your imagination if you're making your own entertainment you have more...what would you say...imagination.

Interviewer: Yeah. And would you agree with that do you think you had more freedom than Dylan has?

Brendan: I would yeah. I definitely did, yeah. But it's down to money and lifestyle as well, isn't it?

The communal interview certainly enhanced this research and in certain cases like the one above allowed for an exchange of views between the generations and allowed the researcher to draw out those who were quiet. However, the workload involved regarding the interview process and the transcription afterwards means that it is best to keep the amount of communal interviews to a minimum.

Methods of analysis, ethics and limitations.

The data analysis process for this research included the listening to interviews, the transcription of recorded interviews, coding of transcripts and the production of case studies.

Listening and the reflexive process

The first step in the data analysis involved the listening back over the recorded interview a number of times. An interview journal was kept in this study and the researcher wrote in this during the listening to the recorded interviews. The interview journal's purpose was to allow the researcher listen to the tone, pauses and content of the interview. This allowed for the researcher to highlight the initial issues that could be seen as important to the research

findings. There was also a reflexive nature to the interview journal that was used as a place for the researcher to take time to evaluate the interview process and their interview skills. This was deemed necessary in order to develop from the first interview through to the subsequent interviews.

Case studies

Case studies of each family were developed to consider the key issues within the interviews including topics and methodological issues. This provided a progression from the initial listening of the individual interviews toward an analysis of the whole family unit and therefore grandparenting. The significant themes of the interviews from each family were drawn out and analysed with regard to the literature and quotes from the transcripts.

Coding

The coding of the transcripts has drawn heavily on the grounded theory methods. Grounded theory methods (GTM) were developed by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss. There are three major phases in GTM coding are open coding, axial coding and selective coding. This series of coding starts with an intricate analysis of transcripts and develops into the making of theories to explain the social phenomena within a study.

Open coding is where the interview transcript is analysed to find specific topics or categories. Charmaz (2006) considers this initial coding as a word-by- word and sentence- by- sentence job but a process that is quick and where the researcher writes down their first instinctive code names. These can be changed or developed in the future. Axial coding then tries to interconnect these categories.

“Axial coding relates to categories and subcategories, specifies the properties and dimensions of a category and reassembles the data you have fractured during initial coding to give coherence to the emerging analysis” (Charmaz 2006, p.60).

Selective coding aims to establish a core category or categories to base a theory upon. Selective coding entails the identification of the core variable. “The core variable is a variable that has ‘analytic power’ because of ‘it’s ability to pull the other categories (variables) together to form an explanatory whole” (Larossa 2005, p.851).

From the beginning stage of looking at words and sentences and indeed the absence of words in the interview transcripts, the identification of categories and the formation of theories is the essence of this coding.

The dynamics of the study

This study involved interviewing three generations that encompassed participants who ages ranged from 8 to 77. A breakdown of the three generations (grandparents, children and grandchildren) and the specifics of the issues in interviewing each generation are a vital part to the methodology of this research.

Interviewing grandparents

The interviews with the grandparents were often the longest because the grandparents had often more to cover: their childhoods, rearing their own children and being a grandparent. The past especially childhoods and their early years was a topic that most grandparents seemed to enjoy talking about. One rural grandmother talked at length about growing up on a farm, the daily and seasonal activities and work that her family and she carried out.

“You know, everyone had their own chores because at that time, most people had a cottage and an acre. And you’d have your own cow ... and you’d have to milk the cow like, you know...you’d use that and whatever would be left over, you’d store it and keep it towards the end of the week and take off the cream off it and make butter. You’d have the calf and couple of pigs, you know. You’d get a plot off the farmer and sow a few potatoes. And then, the October, you’d get a few days off school; you know when the weather would be fine enough to start getting the potatoes to bring home. Put them into a pit and then you’d have to go out there and get the potatoes out of the pit to do the dinner” (Carmel, grandmother aged 70).

These stories illuminated Ireland in the past but sometimes the preference of the grandparent generation to talk about the past was often a barrier to talking about the present. There was a sense from some of the older grandparents that they found it easier to talk about the past than the present. Betty, a grandmother aged 77 had difficulty in remembering the exact number of grandchildren.

Betty: Oh yeah that’s right – seven. Seven. That’s all I have seven...isn’t that all now. That’s all I children I had...is it? (Laughs)

Interviewer: It’s hard to keep track.

Betty: I’m stupid, Fiona.

Interviewer: No, it’s hard to keep track of them all when they get...

Betty: I know, yes.

It was necessary to convey to Betty that it was not essential for her to talk exactly about the numbers of grandchildren. It was her narrative that was important and the interview moulded itself around this. The use of comparative questions aided those grandparents who were

reluctant to talk about the present or who found it difficult to talk about the present. What do you think childhoods are like now compared to childhoods in the past? and Is your grandchild's childhood any different to your own childhood? are examples of questions that were used.

Interviewing children

The children of the grandparents and parents of the grandchildren make up the middle generation. This generation was in some ways the easiest generation to interview because many of those in this generation were of the same age and at similar life stage as the researcher. This provided those in this generation and the researcher with often an initial topic of conversation about children and parenting. This seemed to put the participant at ease straight away and at times resulted in a comprehensive interview.

As with all of the interviews an empathy and understanding with the participant created a rapport between interviewer and interviewee. For example, Karen, aged 32 told of her personal story of the breakdown of her relationship and the resulting issues. That Karen felt comfortable in sharing this story of a difficult time in her life emphasises the importance of treating participants with respect and empathy.

Interviewing grandchildren

The interviews with the grandchildren required a different approach because of the different ways children see the world and especially how children experience time. Children here were respected as confident individuals in their own right with their own stories, experiences and opinions to share. Fraser in Fraser, Lewis, Ding, Kellett and Robinson (eds) (2005) reinforces this stance by stating that children are more than capable of talking about their own lives and that they should be given the right to speak for themselves about their own lives. It is important to acknowledge the need for a different approach when interviewing children. In this study, often there was a need to discuss at length topics of interest to the child themselves which may not have been important to the study. The latest game on the Playstation, television programmes and school are just some of the topics covered in these interviews. It was clear that the children were often happy to talk but not very often to talk about grandparenting. The first stages of talking about what the child wanted to talk about provided a path to allow the researcher get the conversation onto grandparenting.

The way children and adults see, experience and talk about their lives and the world around them is very different. This is especially apparent when talking to children about time. This can be seen in a conversation with Adam aged 8 about his new Playstation game.

Interviewer: Playing the Playstation, what games do you play on that?

Adam: Lego Star Wars (Laughs)

Interviewer: Is that good?

Adam: Yeah (Laughs)

Interviewer: How far are you on that?

Adam: Eh... kind of all... I almost have all the people and all the spaceships. I just need two people and one spaceship to complete the whole game.

Interviewer: And how long have you been playing it?

Adam: Ha ha, since I've got it, from my friend.

For Adam, it is not important how long he has been playing the game. It seems to him to be a silly question that has an obvious answer. There is a need to identify these differences between children and adults in order to fully obtain a child's story and to properly analyse it. Greene and Hill emphasise the importance of acknowledging these differences when dealing with instances where parents and children give differing accounts of the same event. They urge the researcher to not look for the 'truth' but rather indicate that it is more important to present both accounts of the event in a complimentary fashion (Greene and Hogan 2006). This validates the equal importance of both parent and child's experiences.

Limitations of the Study

It is necessary to outline the limitations of any piece of social research. This is an acknowledgement that research is a process that evolves. There is always a place to be reflexive of research undertaken while not diminishing its benefits.

This research was carried out as part of a Masters programme; therefore there were certain time and financial constraints. The research was not funded and there was a specific time frame for its completion. This meant that a longitudinal study, which may have provided evidence of how grandparents move in and out of grandparenting roles, was not possible. There was a limit to the amount of participants because the interviewing had to be completed with enough time remaining for other parts of the research process.

Although the sample does contain a mix of gender, ages and socio-economic backgrounds, there are some groups in Irish society who were not present in the sample. There were no Non-National participants and no participant's from the Travelling Community. There was a variety of family types in this sample but there were no lone fathers or separated/divorced

men. This meant that there was no presence of paternal grandparents who were having difficulties in gaining access to their grandchildren. There was no grandparent who was providing full time care for his or her grandchild.

The limitations of the study need to be identified as they provide hints to possible future research. They also explain why certain choices in the research were made and point to certain key groups that may be difficult to access.

Ethical considerations

The research was conducted within a framework of ethical guidelines with the aim to adhere to the best practice of social research. “Social research should never injure the people being studied, regardless of whether they volunteer for the study” (Babbie 1989, p.474).

This included the ethical standards set down by Waterford Institute of Technology, the researcher’s own experience in conducting ethical research and the Sociological Association of Ireland’s ethical guidelines. The research underwent a rigorous ethical screening and was approved by the Ethics Committee, Waterford Institute of Technology. Ethics and ethical issues were not considered to have finished once approval was received. The researcher aimed to keep the integrity of the research at the heart of every step of the research process.

Consent, anonymity and confidentiality

Obtaining consent from the participants was done using two types of consent: informed consent and process consent.

Informed consent involves ensuring that each participant knows what the study is about including what kind of questions they will be asked in the study. The signing of the consent form (See Appendix C and Appendix D) is explained to not be binding and that they did not have to answer any question they did not want to. The participant is requested to ask to stop any time during the interview if they need a break and most importantly if they no longer wish to take part in the study. The nature of this study meant that there were no foreseen sensitive topics that an informed participant would find distressing and this was the case throughout all the interviews. Therefore, the benefits of informed consent are seen here quite clearly. By providing the public with a clear summary of what taking part in the study entails,

the researcher creates a situation where the participant is fully able to make the correct choice for themselves. Fraser, Lewis, Ding, Kellett and Robinson (eds) (2005) contend that informed consent matters simply because it shows that participating in research was not based on deception or coercion.

Each participant was asked to sign a consent form to indicate that they agreed to participate in the study and for the interview to be digitally recorded. Parents were asked to sign consent forms to allow their children to take part. Children themselves were asked to agree to take part as well as having parental consent. This was in line with the research aim to treat child participants as confident individuals.

Process consent was utilised to enact the steps laid out in getting informed consent. The participant is asked throughout the interview do they wish to stop. This allows the participant ample opportunity to opt out of the study. There is a specific significance of process consent in the interviews with children. Children may be seen by many to have little power when talking to an adult. Process consent was used to give the children interviewed a tool that would allow them to have some power within the interviews.

Each participant was ensured that their identity would remain anonymous. Each participant's name was changed to conceal their identity. The real name, addresses and contact information of the participants was kept in one password protected computer file. The place names or any other information that was deemed to readily identify a participant was edited or changed.

The issues of confidentiality is often confused or taken to mean the anonymity given to the participants. While it is easy to see where this assumption can be made, there is a marked difference between confidentiality and anonymity. Each participant in this research was told that the interview was a once off and that they would not be contacted about the research again. The issues raised in the interviews especially those of a sensitive or private nature would be dealt with the upmost respect.

Issues of confidentiality and the mandatory reporting of child abuse.

Although the researcher did not foresee or experience any situation, which brought up the issue of confidentiality and the mandatory reporting of child abuse it is necessary to discuss the issue. A researcher must prepare and put the necessary guidelines in place when interviewing children for the eventuality (no matter how slim the researcher perceives the possibility to be) of child abuse being disclosed. The consent form (See Appendix) explicitly states that any child abuse disclosed would be followed by the interview being stopped and the researcher along with the research supervisor strictly following the Children First Guidelines (1999).

Black and White ethical research: what about the grey areas?

There are certainly situations within this research and indeed in any research where the researcher must decide themselves what the appropriate course of action is. These situations may be referred to as outside the areas of black and white ethical research; the grey areas. Therefore, not a situation in an interview where the participant is obviously distressed and the interview needs to stop but perhaps were there are a few tears from a participant. The researchers' judgement based on the ethical guidelines that they have based their research on and their own impressions based on their skills as a researcher must be drawn upon here. "The interviewer is there to listen, to observe with sensitivity, and to encourage the person to respond"(Charmaz 2006, p.25).

A grandmother, Ellen, in this study became overwhelmed with emotion when she described how she felt when she became a grandmother for the first time.

Ellen: But when the baby was born...oh! It even brings tears now. (Cries a little) Eh...she's just gorgeous.

Interviewer: Was it...it is very emotional then for you?

Ellen: ...I suppose its new life and she's a little girl. And she was my son's child and it was just lovely. You know and I could never imagine life without her now, you know. (Crying)

Interviewer: Yeah.

Ellen: Sorry.

Interviewer: Are you ok? Do you want to stop for a minute?

Ellen: No, no I'm ok.

Interviewer: Are you sure?

Ellen: Yeah, keep going. No, she's gorgeous. I think you can't explain it and unless you can...you can...I don't think anybody can understand unless you are a grandparent. The beauty of it, you know and the...

There was a balance needed in this situation to ensure the participant, Ellen was able, happy and comfortable to continue and respecting that the crying was a part of her narrative. Therefore, it is not as easy to say if a participant becomes upset or cries stop the interview

because in certain situations as in this case, it is a natural part of the interview. It is better to say if the participant becomes upset, the researcher must use their own judgement as to whether the research is harming the participant and always ask the participant if they wish to continue. Afterwards, Ellen said that she found the interview very good, she felt relaxed and that she enjoyed sharing her feelings on grandparenting.

Conclusion

The methodology had a flexible design that allowed for a full investigation of grandparenting in Ireland while simultaneously employing methods that would provide valid and reliable data. The semi-structured interviews allowed for participants to tell their life stories and their experiences of grandparenting. The data collection was comprehensive with digital recording fully transcribed underlined by a solid ethical grounding. The data analysis included not only the in depth review of transcripts but also a reflection on the researcher's role and skills in the interviews. This analysis provided the formation of the findings of the research.

Chapter Five: Findings and Discussion – Sociology of Grandparenting

Introduction

This chapter will involve the presentation and analysis of findings relating to the sociology of grandparenting. This will cover similar topics to the literature review chapter of the same title. The findings regard the feelings, opinions and view of participants on becoming grandparents, the grandparent role, aging and intergenerational relations.

Transition into grandparenthood

The feelings expressed by the grandparents in this study about how they felt when they found out they were going to be a grandparent was highly dependent on the expected or unexpected role sequence. This expected or unexpected role sequence refers to whether the grandparent expected to become a grandparent or not. The expected role sequence was found where the son/daughter were married or at a certain stage in their own lives. The unexpected role sequence was often found in a situation of unexpected pregnancy especially teenage pregnancy. Grandparents who were expecting to become grandparents generally were not shocked by becoming grandparents. These grandparents viewed the occurrence as a natural progression and part of the cycle of life. In contrast, those who did not expect to become grandparents were shocked and recalled how it took time to come to terms with this unexpected transition.

This experience of shock and needing time to become accustomed to the idea which some grandparents described can be dissected further. There were four families out of the seven in this study that described this unexpected role sequence. In each case, the grandparent generation were not anticipating the transition into grandparenthood because of the age of their children. There was an even gender spilt between these four families: two daughters and two sons, however the concern from the grandparent generation (especially the grandmothers) for the woman who was pregnant was explicit. The grandparents expressed their initial feelings of shock when they were told by their children and how this was quickly followed by concern and worries. An interesting and significant point here is that most of the grandparents were not concerned whether their children were married or not but rather about whether the relationship was stable. The grandmothers especially voiced their concern for the young woman pregnant and often talked about the limitations having a family can have on

further education. These grandparents also described how these feelings of concern and worry seemed to melt away once they saw their grandchild. They explained that it was not that they did not want the grandchild but because of the situation they were often thinking and worrying primarily about their own child.

Figure 3: Overview of Transition into Grandparenthood

Family Name	Byrne	Brennan	O'Brien	Phelan	Kelly	Andrews	Murray
Role Sequence	Expected	Expected	Expected	Unexpected	Unexpected	Unexpected	Unexpected
Details of Daughter/Son	Son aged 27	Daughter aged 31	Daughter aged 33	Daughter aged 19	Daughter aged 19	Son aged 21	Son aged 23
Description of Grandparent's Feelings	<i>"I always loved the little children coming."</i>	<i>"I was thrilled to bits."</i>	<i>"I'm 50 years married, mother of 12 and grandmother to 22."</i>	<i>"It was the biggest shock of my life...I went ballistic."</i>	<i>"I wasn't expecting it."</i>	<i>"It was oh God, what's it going to be like?"</i>	<i>"I did give out to him as well because [son's girlfriend] was in college"</i>

Figure 3 is an overview of the transition into grandparenthood as described by the participants in this study. The transition into grandparenthood reached the same point (happiness and pride of having a new grandchild) for all grandparents in the study although those who did not expect the transition, took longer to get to this point. The transition into grandparenthood is an integral part of the narrative of the grandparent in the study because it is often talked about simultaneously with the issue of aging and feeling old.

Aging

There are two main ways in which the issue of aging was discussed by the grandparents in this study. Firstly, there was often a connection made between becoming a grandparent and whether or not that coincided with becoming old. Secondly, was the assessment that society associated being a grandparent with being old.

As mentioned in the previous section, the transition into grandparenthood is often coupled with the grandparent thinking about their age in different ways. Some grandparents in this study felt that they were too young to be a grandparent. These grandparents were often those

who did not expect to become a grandparent. A recurring issue for many of the grandmothers was how ‘Granny’ conjures up many connotations with old age. They preferred to be called ‘Nanny’. Other grandparents including grandfathers expressed their wish to be called by their first name and not to be called anything that would identify them as grandparents.

Some grandparents talked about how people around them reacted to them when they became a grandparent. There was a sense that Irish society perceived a need to make a joke, a quick quip or a funny look when some of the grandparents disclosed they were a grandparent. While some grandparents felt this was just a societal view and that they did not feel old, others felt that they did not want to be considered old. Mary Brennan, a grandmother aged 52, says that she does not feel old being a grandmother that in fact her grandson has brought out the youth in her. “I would not have any qualms being a Granny.”

Ann Kelly, a grandmother aged 50 feels that many consider her old because she is a grandparent and she is not comfortable with this.

“There is times you feel a bit weird if you’re out with someone. And I have friends who... You know my sister is four years younger than me and she has... her youngest baby is the same age as my grandchild. So sometimes when you’re out and someone will say Granny, she’s a Granny... they look at you strangely and you feel uh-oh. And they suddenly think that maybe you’re older than you actually are because you say you’re a Granny, whereas if you never say you are a Granny- you’re younger.”

It was not only grandmothers who talked about aging and its association with being a grandparent. Kevin Andrews, a grandfather aged 54 describes getting a present soon after he became a grandparent that brought up the issue of aging.

“...and I opening mine and it was kind of like a little silver frame with I love Grandad on it and in this frame was a picture of this real old man. (Laughs) He was this auld lad sitting in the chair and I said oh Jesus this is what a grandfather’s supposed to be and I was kind of shocked. (Laughs) You know the way you kind of well you don’t know but you don’t expect to be kind of grandparents – the notion of being a grandparent gives you the notion of being old.”

There is a connection between the feelings of uncomfortableness with being considered old and aging with the unexpected role sequence. Both Ann and Kevin did not expect to become grandparents. However, this is not the only issue present here. As shown in Chapter 2, the perception of aging and old people by society at large plays its part in influencing the feelings and perceptions of those who are perceived to be aging and becoming old.

Grandparent roles

The role considered by grandparents in this study to be ‘the role of the grandparent’ and the role they actually carried out are not easily typified. Lundström’s (2001) typology of grandparents focused on the childcare aspects of the grandparent role. Many of the grandparents in this study would or have at some stage fitted into her ‘Conscientious Grandparents’ type. This refers to grandparents who are involved in the childcare of their grandchildren. Although given that this is a relatively small sample compared to, Lundström’s it seems that Lundström’s typology is still limiting in describing the roles grandparents undertake. There is still a need to investigate why certain grandparents take on certain roles even if Lundström’s typology can be taken as a broad definition of grandparent types. It is most probable that grandparents may move between different roles during their life course. This may apply particularly when grandparents provide large amounts of childcare before their grandchildren start school.

Figure 4 provides an overview of the grandparents in the study and their roles and their feelings on their roles as grandparent. This progresses from an emphasis solely on the childcare aspect (although a vital aspect) and provides space to consider how grandparents rationalise their role.

Figure 4: Overview of the Grandparent Role

Name	Age	Role	Perception of Role
Ann Kelly	50	Occasional babysitting Support to her daughter. (Lone parent)	Wants her own personal time now that she has reared her own children.
Betty Byrne	77	Provided childcare when grandchildren were younger.	Happy to see all her family come to see her. Very proud to be a great-grandmother.
Carmel O'Brien	70	Provided childcare and still providing childcare.	Likes to mind children now as she has done in the past.
Eilish Phelan	51	Provides childcare for grandchildren before and after school. Support to her daughter who is separated and commutes to work.	Likes to have her personal time and life now. She was a stay at home mother. Now she has gone back to college and is involved in charity work.
Mary Brennan	52	Provides childcare to her grandchild once a week.	Would like to provide more childcare. She was a working mother and would like to be more involved with her grandchild.
Michael Brennan	58	Present when wife cares for grandchild and helps out.	Likes to be involved but steps back when wife is present.
Ellen Andrews	50	Occasional babysitting of grandchild overnight. Support to son and son's girlfriend in particular. (Teenage pregnancy)	Likes to keep a balance between being involved and not doing too much.
Kevin Andrews	54	Involved in babysitting of grandchild.	Describes how he never really thought about how his wife does more of the caring than him. He tends to step back and wife does the feeding and changing of baby grandchild.
Kathleen Murray	62	Provides childcare once a week for grandson. He stays over once a week. Support to son and daughter-in-law.	Likes to see her grandchildren and is happy that she gets on with all her daughter-in-laws
Ted Murray	64	Enjoys the variety and company of his children and grandchildren visiting.	It is nice to see all of them getting on and it is part of life.

Figure 4 above shows that many of the grandparents related their role as a grandparent to their input in the childcare of their grandchildren. However, this was not the only role that was described as a grandparent role. The grandparents in this study viewed the support of their own children and children's partners as an essential part to their grandparenting role. This support was described in various ways such as financial support and emotional support. The grandparents often found it hard to articulate the support and portrayed it as a support of being there for their children and grandchildren. There was a sense from the grandparents that they would offer help and support to the degree that they deemed appropriate to the context. Most grandparents considered the grandparent role as one which involved friendship, companionship and enjoyment with their families.

The rationale that grandparents used to describe and validate their role as a grandparent was often tied to three specific issues. These were the grandparents' parenting of their own children, their experiences with their own grandparents and parents and the situation of their children and grandchildren.

Grandparents often used the parenting of their own children as a framework to explain why they took on a certain grandparent role and in some cases why they did not take on other grandparent roles. Two of the grandmothers who had reared their own children by being stay at home mothers felt that they did not want to provide large amounts of care for their grandchildren. They viewed that it was their time to take more personal time and pursue more individual goals. This may relate to contemporary society's view of the self and life course and the need for constant analysis and development of the life trajectory as discussed in Chapter 2. These grandmothers were not disinterested in their grandchildren, in fact one of them still provided care for their grandchildren before and after school but they still made it clear where the boundaries of care began and ended. In contrast, one grandmother who was a working mother conveyed how much she felt she missed out on, in her own children's lives and how she wanted to be heavily involved in caring for her grandchild. This case may be progressed further with grandfathers who may have had a minimal role in the care of their own grandchildren and now wished to embrace this 'nurturing role'.

The experiences of the grandparents' own grandparents and parents influenced this rationale of the construction of the grandparent role. There was a marked difference between the description of grandparents in the past and the grandparents of the present. The place of

children on the outskirts of the family and the lack of affection shown in a tactile form were the most common observations by the participants. The grandparents in this study embraced the changes in views of society on children from being seen and not heard to a more child centred approach. It is perhaps most apt to draw on one grandmothers experiences and her explanation of why it is so vital to be shown affection in the formative years.

“There’s more of an awareness of the damage and the harm and the things that can be done with children if they’re not loved. It’s not even financially, it’s emotionally. You might have nothing but you can still tell your children they’re loved and they can grow up with that and be rich I suppose in the care and emotion and the love... I wouldn’t have ever been told that... So then you say when you have children well my God I’m going to tell my children and I always did.” (Ellen Andrews, grandmother aged 52)

Finally, the context or situation of their children often prompted the role that grandparents acted out. There was one family where the separation of the daughter was an issue that influenced the grandparents role. The maternal grandmother who was interviewed in the research described how she was involved in taking care of two grandchildren before and after school while her daughter commuted to and from work in Dublin. She described how she and her husband supported their daughter emotionally since she had separated. Her daughter described how her father is a father figure to his grandson. Here it can be seen how grandparents have taken on roles to become pseudo-partners and pseudo-parents. This refers to how the maternal grandparents are carrying out roles which might have been seen as the father’s role before the separation. Although the paternal grandparents were not interviewed, the daughter and grandson stated that all contact with them had finished after the separation. There is a stark contrast here between the maternal grandparents’ role increasing and the paternal grandparents’ diminishing. This reinforces the issues in much of the literature about the dominance of matrilineal ties over patrilineal ties as discussed in Chapter 2.

Matrilineal Versus Patrilineal Bonds

There is much discussion in previous research around the difference and dominance of the mother’s side of the family as opposed to the father’s side of the family. This has been conveyed in the previous section where through separation, the mother’s side of the family increased their contact while the father’s side of the family diminished their contact. This case may be on the extreme in the scale because the father was reported by his ex-partner and son as having minimal to none contact with his children. Therefore it is possible to foresee a case where the father has contact or where there is a shared parenting arrangement that the father’s side would have contact after separation.

A more general discussion on the difference and dominance of the matrilineal and patrilineal bonds is appropriate due to the fact that there was only one instance of separation in the study. It could be hypothesised that due to the biological attributes of women and because women are still the main care providers that there will be a stronger link between the woman's family through the generations. However, it is not enough to work on assumptions and anecdotal accounts.

There was a view from many of the participants that the woman is often the key in intergenerational relations. It was described how the woman will visit and keep the ties with her own family stronger and that the man does not interpret or see these issues in the same way. If this was not the case within the family being interviewed, it was accounted for due to the death of the woman's mother or that she was not living near her mother. A conversation between a grandmother and daughter-in-law describes how women are seen as key actors within intergenerational relations. Kathleen and Lisa discussed at length the way in which women are drawn to their own mothers when they have families of their own. Rather than being a conversation of clichés and gender stereotypes, they talked how it plays out in their own lives. Both Kathleen and Lisa told how they both had to and have to bring their respective husbands to visit his parents. "But it's the lads and it's funny that way – they're very close. Usually it's always mothers go home" (Kathleen, grandmother aged 62). "It's not a bad thing to say about Brendan but if I didn't say will we go down to your mother's, he could leave it two weeks without coming down" (Lisa, daughter-in-law aged 32).

The discourse here in some ways seems to be a perception of how the women feel that there should be stronger links between mothers and their daughters. The grandmother does acknowledge that her sons are still very close but she explains this by saying how her daughter-in-laws are key influences in this scenario. Her daughter-in-law confirms this saying that she is the one who instigates the visits. There is evidence from many of the families that the preference for childcare for children often falls with the maternal grandmother. A paternal grandmother explains how she did not take care of her granddaughter when she was younger.

"No, indeed she wasn't no. She was always up in Granny's because the Mammy was working. She was always up in the Granny's and she'd come home at night time. Then she'd be going to bed when she was a small little child you know" (Betty, grandmother aged 77).

There may be a shift away from this clear distinction between maternal and paternal grandparents or certainly evidence that this is not the case in all families. Aoife Brennan describes how she wants her son to know both sets of grandparents.

“Yeah, definitely. I’d like him to know them both equally...you know she [paternal grandmother] wouldn’t be a stranger to him.”

There are ambiguities and complexities to this issue. It is certain that there seems to be in evidence and in discourse that there is a stronger connection with the maternal family particularly the maternal grandparents. However, this is not always the case and the reasons for this are certainly associated with the situation of the family, the popular anecdotes and a shift from the woman as primary and only carer toward the ‘nurturing role’ of men.

Intergenerational relations

The importance of intergenerational relations and having all the generations together were often heralded by the participants. It was more difficult for the participants to articulate why good intergenerational relations were so important. The Granny’s house was often described as the heart of the family, a central meeting place for all the generations to get together. In certain cases the simplicity of being together was a sufficient account of intergenerational relations.

“Granny she’s always looking after like everybody, like, all the children and everything. Because like, it’s like everyone, this is the house, the whole family always like comes here, it’s like the heart of the family. And Granny like, she’s always, always looking after like kids and that and I think she really enjoys it, you know having the little kids around and stuff”(Emma O’Brien, granddaughter aged 17).

The togetherness, company and interacting were something that participants found hard to describe but they were certain that it was an important aspect of their own lives and family life.

The participants were quick to explain that if there was difficulty in everyone getting along, especially with son’s/daughter’s spouses it would make intergenerational relations difficult.

Many of the participants viewed that intergenerational relations could be very difficult if certain people did not get on well together. Brendan (a son aged 33) talked in the following passage about how he felt lucky that his wife and mother have a good relationship.

Interviewer: Is it important that they [his mother and wife] get on well?

Brendan: It is of course, yeah. (Laughs) It’s easier anyway...Keep either of them happy and that keeps me happy.

Interviewer: It'd be difficult if they didn't get on?

Brendan: Ah yeah. I have friends that don't...that they don't get on with their wives or partners. I see what they go through so I'm lucky enough like that.

Grandparents drew on their own previous experiences with intergenerational relations as a guide how to keep the ties close. There was an acknowledgement that criticism and interference in parental techniques were not appropriate from grandparents unless the child's safety was at risk.

"I wouldn't interfere, I wouldn't ever tell them you shouldn't be saying that to him or you shouldn't be giving him that or you shouldn't be. You know I absolutely wouldn't. I think that...maybe you just think back to when you were a parent and you certainly don't like anybody telling you" (Mary, grandmother aged 52).

It may seem that intergenerational relations are a one sided issue with family members just wanting to spend time together but this is a too simplistic view of a complex dynamic. The intergenerational relations are what bonds the generations together in many complex and differing ways.

Conclusion

The transition into grandparenthood may be an expected part of the natural cycle of life or maybe totally unexpected. It can often cause an individual to assess their life regarding aging and the choice of grandparenting role. Childcare is certainly an issue in the grandparent role but supporting children and the grandparent-grandchild relationship are also part of this. The dominance of the maternal bonds is not an issue that can be easily denied or confirmed. However, it is true in the case of some of the families in this study. The explanations why are varying from the breakdown of relationship to the perceived strength of the mother-daughter relationship. Intergenerational relations are what bind the grandparents of today and the younger generations together in implicit ways.

Chapter Six: Findings and Discussion – Contemporary Society

Introduction

This chapter deals with varying issues that situate grandparenting today in contemporary society. The changes in family, gender issues and childhood are discussed with reference to the families in this study and the trends in wider society. It is necessary to consider the accounts given by the participants of these issues in the past, in order to provide in depth analysis. The views of participants on the past are coupled with their views on present Irish society and Irish communities. This prompts an observation of the notion of self-identity in modern times.

Family change

An overview of the changes in family size and structure has been discussed within Irish society in the literature review and with the sample of participants in the methodology. It is possible to tease out these issues further with a presentation of the contrasts in family size and structure between the generations of the families in this study.

There is certainly a decrease in family size down through the generations of the families in this study. The number of children in the grandparent's family (that is to say grandparent and siblings) ranged from 2 to 15. (The average number per grandparent was 6.5.) There was a reference to the higher levels of infant mortality within the grandparent generation. The grandparent who was the youngest of 15 children described this

“Well, there was 15 of us, but there was...I had four sisters lived and six brothers...six. But the others like died young, you know...Say two years of age or... there was a lot of infant mortality those years, you know” (Carmel, grandmother aged 70).

The average number of children that a grandparent had was 5.8. The number of children per grandparent ranged from 2 to 12. The number of children that the son's/daughter's had was markedly narrower. The son's/daughter's had between one and two children. The average being 1.28. The number of grandchildren that each grandparent had was between 1 and 22, with an average of 7.4.

This decrease in family size in the sample is quite remarkable but it is in keeping with the decrease in fertility rates in Ireland and across most western societies. The decrease in size is

not the only change that has occurred. There is also a change in the household make-up between the generations. This refers not only to the number of children within a household as has been shown but also the occurrence of more than two generations living in a household.

Half of the grandparents interviewed referred to family members from different generations living in the same household when they were growing up. In the majority of cases this was grandparent's own grandparents living with them or living in their grandparent's house. Another key group identified as living with the grandparent's immediate family were uncles and aunts who were often described as single or bachelors. There was one grandmother who stated that an older sister's child had come to live with them when their mother had died. This reference to more than the parents and children living in the one household declines down through the generations. Some of the sons/daughters did mention living with older generations especially grandparents but it was often for a specific limited time period. There were no grandchildren in this study that were living with their grandparents at the present time. Two of the lone parents who had teenage pregnancies did live with their parents for the first years of their children's lives.

The question of who is living with who in a family context has transformed radically between the grandparents' generation and the grandchildren's generation. The large family of mother, father and children living along with older generations specifically grandparents has been eroded to a household with a small number of occupants with very often only two generations: parents and children. The sample does not provide an example of grandparents and grandchildren living together in current times, but this research is not suggesting that there are no examples of this to be found in the wider Irish society. However, it is certain that the multigenerational households of the past are becoming a minority and where they do occur in contemporary society they are often associated with lone parents, separation and grandparents who are caring for their grandchildren full time. These situations also seem to have a transient nature, only lasting for specific time periods.

The participants acknowledged the changes in family life. There were some who saw it as part of a wider societal change and that contemporary living could be accounted for by specific family constructs and types. The lower number of children that people are having in current times was considered part of contemporary family life. One grandfather commented that having large numbers of children was not part of contemporary living. "Not in this day

and age... Different time. Different era. Today's people are much more well up" (James, grandfather aged 58).

The issue of living with more than two generations in the one house was often considered part of family life in the past. However, when probed further some participants described how difficult this living situation could be. One grandmother recalled how she felt living with her husband's mother had in some ways limited her ability to mother her own children.

"We didn't have a house of our own so ye didn't really feel...to me I don't think I realised that I had, that the girls were my children until they were ten or eleven. You know I always felt...now maybe it was when I was so young having them but I did always feel like that someone was always telling me what I should be doing with them" (Mary, grandmother aged 52).

Aoife, a daughter aged 33 describes how she perceives families to have changed.

"I reckon they've got smaller and years ago there would have been more...maybe, say my Mam and Dad lived with Granny... People lived with their extended families, I'm not saying it's a good thing or anything but they just did. That was the way it was and...Just couldn't afford to get their own houses and then a lot of the times, you know – men didn't want to move away from their mothers or something."

There is a lot of truth in Aoife's statement. It has been discussed how family size and multigenerational households have declined. The increase of two income families and changing masculinities are certainly issues to consider as contributing to this family change.

The participants did not portray a catastrophic future for families akin to Almond's (2006) work but they did acknowledge the challenges certain family types may encounter in the future. This was often done after the interview was finished officially and came by the way of 'on the way out the door' comments. Again Aoife provides a succinct view reflecting many of the participants' opinions.

"The only thing that I can see is that there is a lot more...you know...people that aren't married so there will be a lot more single parent families...Or a lot more girls that have two kids to two different fathers and you know trying to deal with that in the future... You know one kid going to one Dad and the other kid going to another."

These specific issues that the participant and indeed Almond (if not to agree in totality with the perspective offered by Almond) are worth further exploring.

Changing Childhoods

The participants talked in various ways and on a variety of topics regarding childhood. The differences between childhood in the present and the past were discussed by the majority of

participants. The type of childhoods experienced by the grandparents and grandchildren portrayed a shift from children being involved in work in the past to children whose lives are centred on education and play in the present. The place of children within the family and society has changed. The concept of showing love and affection was highlighted by many of the participants as a major difference between past and present. The main issues which recurred in many of the participant's narratives were related to the decline in freedom that children have in contemporary society and this was often linked with an increase in child safety issues. The use of Information Communication Technology (ICT) by the younger generations especially grandchildren can be seen to create a 'generation gap' but it does not cause much conflict within the families in this study.

The shift from children being involved in work, mainly household work and working on family farms, to children who are occupied with education and play is clear from the life stories of the participants. Grandparents recalled being heavily involved in carrying out duties for the family household. This included work outside, fetching milk from the local farmer, getting messages from the shop, taking care of younger siblings and housework. There was a presence of education but often going to school was stopped in rural areas when they were needed on the farm and if there was a need for a child to go to work to contribute to the family income.

“We were outside an awful lot more...we would have worked outside a lot” (Ann, grandmother aged 50).

“I suppose we all enjoyed school really, a lot of us did anyhow. I suppose it was a break away (Laughs) a break away from the chores that you'd be doing. You know everyone had their chores because at that time most people had a cottage and an acre...you'd have to milk the cow like...October, you'd get a few days off school – you know when the weather would be fine enough to start getting the potatoes to bring home” (Carmel, grandmother aged 70).

“Walk home from school every evening and every morning...we hadn't bicycles until we were maybe thirteen or fourteen...we done everything on foot. We used to go to get milk...every evening when we came home from school and that was a good long ways...There were no bicycles or nothing like that until you were thirteen or fourteen then you had a bicycle and went to work. The week I was fourteen I was working” (Betty, grandmother aged 77).

The children's lives in this study were centred on school, friends, play and sport which are a stark contrast from the childhood experiences of their grandparents. Jane, a grandchild aged 13 describes how she thinks her life and that of her grandmother's childhood may have differed. “Well they would have had a black and white telly. Would they? They wouldn't have mobile phones. There'd be no Playstations or DVDs.”

In some ways Jane pinpoints a central difference: the lack of technology in the past but specifically, this illustrates the vast gap between the grandparent's childhood and the grandchild's childhood. It seems quite likely that Jane could not imagine a childhood like her grandmother's.

The place of children within the family and society was a contrast between the past and present discussed by many participants. There were accounts of 'children should be seen and not heard', the lack of openness and lack of affection shown to children in the past. Inglis describes it as "...a child-rearing practice that involved physical and emotional distance. Children were not to be indulged" (Inglis 2008, p.4).

A recurring word in the discourse about parents and especially grandparents in the past was strict. There was a sense that there was a constant power, discipline and dominance of adults over children in the past compared to contemporary times. "They would have had stricter ideals on upbringing, I think..." (Amy, daughter aged 27). "Grandparents years ago were a lot stricter. They'd be a lot easier going now, you know" (Liam, son aged 40).

There was often an explanation given for this strictness as a result of the hard times that people had in the past. One grandmother expressed this conflict between viewing her grandmother as strict and empathy for the life her grandmother had.

"...she was strict enough but I don't know we used to think she was no fun or she was kind of always giving out. But after when you think [of] the hard life she had and you know...she was grand" (Eilish, grandmother aged 51).

The way in which children are allowed to communicate and the openness in relationships in current times was described as absent in the past specifically the grandparents' generation.

"I suppose the grandchildren now, probably, kids speak up to you now whereas we wouldn't have to our grandparents...we would have probably been more nervous to speak up or to talk" (Ann, grandmother aged 50).

It was not only in communication that children in the past had very different experiences than in present times. The way in which emotions and affection were allowed to be shown was minimal in many of the grandparents' childhoods. "...in my generation parents might have loved you dearly – I'm sure my mother did but she didn't show it." (Ellen, grandmother aged 50)

There was one grandmother who described a very different childhood experience. She describes her grandparents, particularly her grandfather as being very affectionate.

“They were lovely so they were, always very good. He loved children – Grandfather. He used to have Joey [her brother] on his knee, you know at night time – jigging and singing and whistling for him” (Betty, grandmother aged 77).

This account of the grandparents’ experiences of growing up seems to be significantly different from the majority of the grandparents in this study. This does not mean that this particular grandmother’s experiences are not valid but rather suggests that her experiences mark the beginning of a change in childhood as has been described. Giele and Elder (eds) (1998) would describe this instance of a different experience between those within the same cohort as an example of an ‘innovator’. This grandfather who was showing his grandchildren love and affection when many like him were not displays a precursor of what was to follow in subsequent generations. It seems apt that a grandfather who may be viewed as ‘before his time’ displays how often major changes in society such as changes in childhood are often long, slow processes.

The relationship between the perceived lack of freedom that children have and the increase in child safety and child protection issues in contemporary Ireland was commented on by many participants. There was a communal view that the grandchildren in this study (and all who are children at present) have less freedom than their parents and grandparents had growing up. Children were seen as being kept inside and supervised more than in any previous generation. “The freedom is not there first of all. You can’t let them out and be happy and be contented” (Carmel, grandmother aged 70).

This lack of freedom was explained through a perception of the lack of security and peace of mind around giving children freedom in current times. Grandparents and parents described how they were let outside and nobody came to check they were ok but that they would not allow this to happen to their own children.

“Yeah sure we were off...out and up in Grandad’s sheds...God only knows! You know what I mean. No one came looking for us because they just thought they’re ok whereas there is no way I’d let Ben [her son] do that now” (Aoife, daughter aged 33).

This is linked to the ‘fear of the unknown’, fear of not knowing who is living in the area and a wider fear of occurrences that are portrayed through mass media especially relating to missing children.

There was a definite 'generation gap' when it came to ICT between many of the grandparents and grandchildren. The grandparents and parents felt that children of today spend too much time indoors using ICT such as laptops, mobile phones and games consoles such as Playstations, X Box and Nintendo. Grandchildren felt that grandparents were not able to use many forms of ICT and didn't know much about ICT. However, both generations seemed to accept the other's interest or lack of interest as just part of life. Many of the parents talked about having to control the time their children spent with ICT and that if they did not do this, the child would never stop using the game console or mobile phone. There was a view from both grandparents and parents that ICT often provided a barrier in communicating with the child.

An example of how this occurs in family life is the Playstation having three meanings within the Kelly Family. In this instance, meaning refers not to what the Playstation is but rather what the Playstation represents, perhaps even a sociological meaning.

For Adam, the Playstation is the centre of his social world and occupies much of his spare time. It is a platform, which allows him to escape from his everyday life, and perhaps play in ways that are no longer allowed in contemporary society. Many games use a progression and discovery of new worlds as the backdrop. It could be argued that children are no longer allowed to discover and explore on their own especially when it comes to playing outside.

Amy, daughter aged 27 does not behold such a favourable meaning to the Playstation. She acknowledges that the Playstation is a good outlet to keep Adam busy when Amy herself is busy. However, it is getting Adam away from the Playstation and doing other things is a lot more difficult. "...kids spend a lot more time like him on the Playstation and stuff like that. So there's not as much family interaction because it's all about the TV. and the Playstation" (Amy).

The Playstation takes on another meaning for the grandmother, Ann. For Ann, the Playstation is somewhat of an obscure entity that she cannot quite come to grips with. She reiterates what Amy has said about the Playstation being a barrier to communicating with Adam.

"I suppose he's kind of hyper. I find it hard to get him to do a lot of things with you really because he's kind of ...he's attention span wouldn't be great and he does like to be on the Playstation and stuff like that" (Ann).

Childcare

There was an overwhelming view from the participants that grandparent care was the ‘next best thing’ to parental care. The preference of grandparent informal care compared to formal childcare was resounding by the participants. There were many reasons for this such as the flexibility of informal childcare compared to that of formal childcare particularly with regard to shift work, the worries about the ratio of children to childcare staff in a formal setting and the developmental needs of the child being met in a formal setting. These issues combined resulted in the primary view that grandparent care was the ‘next best thing’.

“I think it would be a good idea (getting grandparents to care for their grandchildren) because I see it with a few of Aoife’s friends that have their kids in day-care and crèches... I think the grandparents will give the children more attention than they will get in crèches and all... I’ve seen it – they [children who attend formal childcare] don’t talk as much when they haven’t people you know....” (Mary, grandmother aged 52).

The rejection of formal childcare was explicitly linked to the participant’s views of formal childcare. Formal childcare was often described as a final option for many families, it was considered cruel to leave children in formal childcare for long days and that grandparents would provide better care than formal childcare.

“...in the morning time say maybe seven o’clock or going on for seven o’clock was fathers out in the car with their babies in the car seats and that...bringing them on to the baby minder at that hour in the morning and then going back in the evening....doesn’t seem right to me” (Carmel, grandmother aged 70).

This is not to say that the participants thought badly of those parents who use formal childcare. On the contrary, there was a lot of empathy for these parents albeit within the participants’ own perception of what using formal childcare meant to them. There was sympathy given to families who had moved from the area they grew up on and families who were not of Irish origin and who may not have their extended family around them. “...there is so many people moving that don’t have the extended family and...you know foreign nationals; they don’t have their extended family either.” (Eilish, grandmother aged 51)

The participants in this study provide only one side of this issue because none of them were using formal childcare. They did provide an insight into how those who only use informal childcare particularly grandparent care rationalise and explain for this choice. There was evidence of some of the grandmothers in this study who used formal childcare and their rationalisation was heavily based on economic necessity. This economic factor is another dimension to the choice of informal or formal care. It involves not only those who state they

need to use formal childcare due to financial reasons but also those women certainly a proportion of lone mothers who cannot afford formal childcare.

Women and Society

The balance that working mothers try to achieve between work and caring for their children is considered a contemporary issue because of the increase of the participation of women in the labour force. This was reiterated by the women in this study however, there was evidence of working mothers in the older generations of this study. The nuances of the challenges of working mothers that women are faced with in contemporary Ireland were identified by the women. The choice and preference for women to care for children especially some grandmothers was also displayed.

The concept of the working mother is often associated with modern times and that older women would not have worked when they were rearing their children. Although this was certainly a trend, it was not the case in all situations. The two oldest grandmothers in this study described how they worked when their children were young. Carmel described how she worked on the family farm and how she remembered other women in the area working.

“There was plenty of work but no pay. [Referring to working on the farm.]...I even remember the women walking up to the bigger farms, you know. They used to work up in the bigger farms and they used to walk home at all hours of the night then” (Carmel, grandmother aged 70).

It seems that often when mothers were working in the past, they were carrying out what could be described as informal work which was often casual. Betty worked as a housekeeper for a local family when her children were young. “...well I was working in McMahan’s at the time. I don’t know what I was getting....it was...I wasn’t getting much anyway. They weren’t paying that much money then! (Laughs)” (Betty, grandmother aged 77).

The cases of Carmel and Betty may be examples of exceptions to the case of working mothers in the past. One grandmother described the occurrence of more women entering the labour force through the generations of her own family.

“Like say when I was growing up...the mother, my mother it would have been unheard of for a mother working. Whereas when my kids were small, some mothers worked. But now with my daughter’s generation, practically everyone works” (Eilish, grandmother aged 51).

The balance between work and caring for children that contemporary Irish women were faced with was referred to by many women in this study. The financial necessity for some mothers

to work was often the main factor for entering the workforce. “We were on shift work and I suppose if I look back now I...I would have preferred not to have been working all the time if I had a choice but we financially didn’t have the choice, you know” (Ellen, grandmother aged 50).

There was often a feeling that women felt torn between providing income for their families and caring for their children in the way that they wished.

“I’d love to be at home now. I’d really love to be at home. Or at least working only two days or three days a week...It’s unfair on them for me to be working such long hours. You know. Dean [her son] is quite independent, he’s really good – gets himself up in the morning and off to school. Gets his own breakfast, you know and he’s very independent. He has to be” (Karen, daughter aged 32).

The struggle that women had in the past to be allowed into the labour force seems to have now developed into a new struggle for many working mothers who face the challenge of balancing work with family life.

Perhaps an insight into why this causes such a challenge for many women lies in the choice and preference of many women particularly grandmothers in this study to be heavily involved in care work. There were many comments in the interviews of this research that Grannies carried out most of the care of their grandchildren when the grandchildren were in their home and that Grannies were the most often asked to care for grandchildren. There was a perception that this was primarily the case because this was what many grandmothers wanted and not because it was ‘women’s work’. “I still think it’ll be a Granny thing” (Mary, grandmother aged 52). “A mother’s thing. A woman’s thing in a sense. It shouldn’t be but it probably will be” (James, grandfather aged 58) .

It is hard to decipher in the participants’ discourse what it is their opinion, actuality and what they think they should say about the issue often regarding what is considered politically correct. There are three key areas that can be identified from these discourses that relate to the grandmother carrying out the care duties, the grandfather stepping back and the grandmother being asked to do the caring. Many of the grandmothers described how they wanted to carry out the care duties of their grandchildren and were happy to do so. They often said that the grandfathers were more than capable of doing the same care duties as them but that they did them. It would be difficult to assess whether the grandfather stepped back or the grandmother did not allow him to take part. It is most likely a combination of the two which

occurs at a variety of levels between each set of grandparents. “I probably would, yeah. [Do the caring] But I’d probably choose to...It’s not that...Kevin [Her husband] would, there’s no problem either but I suppose I want to do it”(Ellen, grandmother aged 50).

Masculinities, men and the increase of their ‘nurturing role’

It is not only women who have experienced changes in their role in society. As many women’s role moved from being solely in the home as carers, many men have been more involved in caring. There was certainly what may be described as a ‘traditional grandfather’ in this study. The fathers in this study often appeared to more involved in caring than their own father’s had been. Some grandfathers who were not involved fathers had become involved grandfathers. There was a display of certain masculinities that seemed to be more for show that a reflection of reality.

The ‘traditional grandfather’ may be used to specify a grandfather who has limited contact with grandchildren and is not involved in any caring duties for his grandchildren. It is difficult to determine if this ‘traditional grandfather’ is confined to older men but certainly this type of grandfather is found in older grandfathers in this study. A grandfather in his 70s was described by his teenage granddaughter as being less involved with grandchildren than her grandmother. “I don’t know, I think Grandad kind of enjoys his...you know, his personal time more. I don’t know ” (Emma, granddaughter aged 17).

The fathers in this study were often described as more involved with rearing their children than their own fathers had been. In certain cases, grandfathers who were not involved fathers became involved grandfathers. One grandmother described how her husband became more involved when they had grandchildren. “I’d say he just wasn’t into the family as much as he would be now” (Eilish, grandmother aged 51).

One grandfather described how he was left out of the loop when the issue of minding his granddaughter came up. It was always his wife who was asked. “...you know Casey [His son’s girlfriend] would always or Eamon [His son] will always ask Ellen [His wife] can you mind the baby. They don’t ask me like you know” (Kevin, grandfather aged 54).

Again there is interplay here between grandmothers taking on the caring role, grandfathers stepping back, grandfathers wanting to be involved and parents asking grandmothers to provide care for their children.

The display of masculinities or what was perceived as masculine traits by certain male participants is worth investigating. It may provide an insight into the dynamic of being male and having a 'nurturing role'. There were instances where it seemed that the men being interviewed were displaying certain masculine traits through jokes or sideways comments. It was interesting that when these comments were taken up on, the men contradicted them in their own conduct. One grandfather joked that it is easier second time around with grandchildren because his wife does most of the minding but when asked if this was really the case. This answer follows, "Ah no...we all do our bit" (James, grandfather aged 58).

This grandfather seems to have wanted to display a fake notion of his role as a grandfather linked with his masculinity but in reality this was untrue. This complexity between what men portray to be their masculinity and what masculinity they enact adds further dimensions to their 'nurturing role.'

Romanticism of 'Old Ireland'

There was an opinion from many of the participants from the two older generations that the past specifically their own childhood experiences were better than contemporary society. There were a number of reasons that this opinion was based on, regarding materialism, nature and freedom.

The lack of freedom that children have now compared to in the past has been discussed in the Childhood section. This lack of freedom was often connected with a limited childhood where often imagination and innovation were suppressed.

Materialism was a strong theme that appeared in one family's narrative as a negative aspect of modern or present day living. It manifested itself in many different areas of the family narrative. The most insightful aspect was Carmel; the grandmother's disdain for being overly materialistic was regarding childcare regarding practices of modern families. She was

genuinely upset that parents had to leave their children at a childminders in the early hours of the morning before work.

“You know, I think you could do with a lot less and be there with your children and be there for them and know that you’re there. That they know you’re there. Oh I couldn’t understand that at all...that broke me heart” (Carmel, grandmother aged 70).

Carmel and her daughter, Mary talked very openly and candidly about their feelings and opinions often very negative ones on contemporary living. At the essence of analysing their opinions is the verge of the romanticism and reality of the past and present but particularly with regard to the past. It is often said that when people think about the past they do so through rose tinted glasses and this may be very true for both Carmel and Mary but these issues are more complex than the old cliché.

Carmel’s story can place how these strong negative feeling of modern life can be produced. The changes in family life and Irish society that have taken place in over the last seventy years, since Carmel was born are both large scale and numerous. However, to actually hear the story of a life, a personal story makes it grounded, fresh and unbelievable all at once. Carmel told of how people lived without modern technology especially in the home where she used to draw water from a local pump, gather sticks on the roadside for an open fire, work the land for its produce and where shops were not often needed. These are perhaps common anecdotes of life in the past but there are many stories, which are less commonplace.

“And they used to draw the potatoes in the horse and cart. I remember them coming down here one day and the horse fell and they were in a desperate state. And I was only very young, so they brought me out, like you know, and put me lying across the horses’ head. And the reason was the horse fell under the load and eh they had to remove the traces and the belly band and eh to get to shove the cart back so then when horse would lep up, he wouldn’t be hurted, you know. Ah they were different times, sure we done everything, you know, we’d see no danger in anything. Like I went out there and lie on the horses head and when he couldn’t see what was happening...” (Carmel, grandmother aged 70).

This story of Carmel as a child, lying over a horse’s head is an incredible one in contemporary times. It is very hard to consider this happening today. This can help to explain how big the difference can be within generations of the one family. The negativism of modernity is quite strong in Carmel and Mary’s narratives and is compounded by the romantic view of the past. There was no mention of the past patriarchal system, which left most women as housewives, mothers and little choice to continue on to further education. This does not mean that their views can be dismissed because firstly this research wanted to tell all participants stories not just the ones which corresponded and fitted into the desired

results. Secondly and most importantly, many families in this research have expressed the negative feelings about modern life particularly in relation to materialism.

Changing Communities

Many participants described how living in contemporary Ireland had changed the community aspect of living relating to the lack of community in current times. This was often attributed to the more transient nature of communities now. People can move in and out of communities more regularly and the commuter lifestyle effect this notion. There was a feeling that neighbours have become unknown people, strangers whereas in the past you knew your neighbours. There seemed to be a rural urban divide in this notion. In certain cases the views on the lack of community was contradicted by an account of the participant's own community.

Ted, a grandfather describes how in the past you knew nearly every person who lived near you whereas today people don't know their neighbours that well or even at all.

“The community was more stable as regards when you moved into an area you could spend your whole childhood and teenage years around the same people. So wouldn't...you'd know everybody. There was nobody buying houses or moving out. Well there was the odd few that would move.”

The account by participants living in rural areas was at times different. There was a perception from some of the rural participants that living in a rural area meant that there was more of a community spirit and that you knew many of your neighbours. This related to a view that living in a rural area from generation to generation produces families that stay the same with similar principles and values. Rural Ireland, in this case may be seen as creating a capsule or bubble for those who inhabit it. Liam, a son aged 40 believes that his daughter, Jane will keep similar values to himself unless she moves away from the area.

“Ah...when you're reared in the country and if they stay around things more or less stay the same... If they go off and come back or whatever it might be different. They'd learn different ways but... I'd say she'll more or less, the way she's brought up that's the way she'll bring up hers or that's the way she'll act when the time comes you know.” (Liam, son aged 40)

This further emphasises the view of a gap between rural and urban life in Ireland. Here Liam sees that urban areas and living in an urban area will produce different values in Jane than if she remained in the rural area she was brought up in.

Again there was a presence of the discourse provided by participants often not a true reflection of reality when probed into by the researcher. One grandmother described the

decline of community in current times yet later in the narrative she described how she regularly visited and checked in on elderly neighbours. This contradiction does not mean that the grandmother's feelings of the decline of community are not real or valid. It does show the way in which opinions and reality can often be polarised.

Self-Identity

The use of self identity within the narratives and life stories of the participants was present at varying levels. There were some participants who explained and analysed their life choices and life paths by analysing why they made certain choices. This has been displayed in the way in which many grandparents described the role they took on as grandparents with specific reference to their parenting. One grandmother who was a stay at home mother did not want to take on the role of a childminder for her grandchildren because she wanted her own personal time now having reared her own children. Another grandmother who was a working mother, wanted to be involved in caring for her grandson because she felt she had in some ways missed out on her own children.

This analysis and development of self identity: where we have come from, what roles we had, where we are going and what roles we will take seem to be specific to contemporary society. The older grandparents did not account for their lives in this way, they tended to offer a description of the lives they had lived and were living rather than an analysis. Giddens (1991) reiterates this with his hypothesis that the emphasis on the individual and their own individual life course was absent in pre-modern times. It may be significant that with the rise of the concept of self identity is the decline in religion. The majority of the grandparents mentioned or alluded to God and religion in their interviews. This was compared with a near absence of reference to religion by the two younger generations. It seems that a combination of increased individualisation and loosening of social prerequisites specifically around role sequence has developed a fluidity in contemporary living. There is space in contemporary society for choice and variety in role sequence, relationships and work which seems to have developed a reflexive nature in people as they form and analyse their lives.

Conclusion

The different aspects of contemporary living, contemporary Ireland have been presented individually but they are linked and form a backdrop to grandparenting in contemporary

Ireland. The changes in family, childhood and gender issues have been shown through the participant's accounts of both past and present. The ways in which the participants articulated their views on these changes provide an insight into what is significant in individual and family life. The presentation in a fairytale fashion of Ireland in the past by some participants shows how often there can be a selective process in recalling the past. However, the concerns for the lack of freedom for children, the rise in materialism and the decline in communities are valid issues expressed by the participants. Finally, the evolution of self-identity through the analysis of the life course shows how people in contemporary society including participants in this study evaluate and constructs their roles.

Chapter Seven: Findings and Discussion – Personal Stories

Introduction

The presentation of some of the personal stories of the participants is part of a key objective of highlighting the participants' voices. The use of personal stories can benefit the findings as they can often illustrate what a particular finding means in reality, within an individual's life. The promotion of the child's voice has been stated as an aim of this research and some of the children's narratives are displayed in this section. The life of a rural grandmother in her 70s is used to further emphasise the main findings of this research. A grandmother and grandfather's experience of parenting their son in his early 20s and being grandparents is represented. Finally, an in-depth portrayal of how a breakdown in a relationship resulted in the severance of paternal ties within a family in this study is also included.

The things children say: Adam's view of his grandmother

Adam Kelly is 8 years old boy and he participated in this study with his mother and maternal grandmother. He is an only child and lives with his mother. He was a very likeable child who was standing outside waiting for the interviewer to arrive on the interview day. He was keen to show off his various toys and dog.

Adam, although having agreed to take part in the interview, found it difficult to answer the questions about his grandmother. There are a few reasons that may be speculated to explain Adam's reluctance or difficulty in the interview. Adam goes to an Irish speaking school and at times he found it difficult to think of what he wanted to say in English. This seems only a minor problem as does not speak Irish outside of school. It seems that like most children Adam's age, he does not find it interesting to talk about his grandmother. He talked very capably about the Playstation and his cousin, both which seem to have a great significance in Adam's life. He describes how far he is in Lego Star Wars, a game for the Playstation. "Eh... kind of all. I almost have all the people and all the spaceships. I just need two people and one spaceship to complete the whole game" (Adam).

Adam immediately tells of his cousins when asked if he has any brothers or sisters. He talks especially about one cousin in particular who is around the same age as him, the two boys have a brother like relationship. "We keep fighting over the Playstation" (Adam).

It could be possible that for Adam, his cousins and extended family become a pseudo nuclear family because he lives alone with his mother. This is more than likely enabled because of the extended family live in close proximity to each other.

Adam's lack of communication and perceived lack of interest in talking about his grandmother is reflected in previous research on intergenerational relations that showed how the youngest generation place the least value on the importance of three generations (Bengston 2001). This does not mean that Ann, his grandmother is not an important person in Adam's life. The following is an excerpt where the interviewer is trying to get Adam to talk about his grandmother. In ways, he seems to be joking and making answers that perhaps his mother may pick up on. Another factor is perhaps that the questions are related to how adults perceive time and relationships and that the child understands time and relationships in different ways.

Interviewer: And do you see her often?

Adam: Nah, just about one day...once a month

Interviewer: Once a month?

(Mother says that's not true)

The unwritten story of the interview is the feelings of warmth, love and friendship that the interviewer felt while in the presence of the three generations of the Kelly family. While being respectful to the child's voice, Adam's voice it seems that in his social world, social language does not include the ability of evaluating grandparenting or three generations. This does not mean that the child's voice is not important but provides insight into how to interpret it. It also means that including the child's voice may mean that the researcher valuing an interview with a child in different ways than an interview with an adult. For example, it may not be easy as seen in the case here with Adam to gain exact, reliable data from some children around the specific time they spend with their grandparents. The benefits of interviewing children need to be seen not only as gaining data in fixed ways (specifically relating to adult's perception of time) but as promoting the child's voice in research and allowing the child tell their own story in their own way.

A rural grandmother in her 70s

Betty Byrne is 77, the oldest participant in this study. She lives in a rural area that is situated about five miles from Carlow Town. Betty, a mother, grandmother and great-grandmother is recently widowed. She lives in a cottage next door to her son Liam. Her daughter, Mary

along with another son Joseph also lives nearby in this small rural community. Liam participated in this study. He is Betty's second youngest son. Liam is 40, married and has one daughter, Jane aged 13. Jane also participated in the research.

Betty's cottage is the central meeting place for the extended family. There is a quaint sleepy village atmosphere to this rural area. The key is found left in the door for any son, daughter or grandchild to let themselves in. There is a clear place for children especially grandchildren in Betty's house. She describes how she loves to see her grandchildren and now great-grandchildren coming to visit.

"I always loved the little children coming and everything like that you know. And being a Great-Granny – sure it's a great privilege to be a Great-Granny...Oh I love it. I love it. I love to have them all around. And Joe did too. My husband" (Betty).

The family generally meet every Sunday in Betty's house and it is obvious from Betty's interview that this is very important to her. She seems to cherish the company and strong ties she has with her family. "You'd be looking forward to them coming out, you know" (Betty).

Betty described how central Mass was to her life when she was growing up. She described Mass as a social event especially because they did not go into Carlow Town very often. "A novelty to go anywhere, you know for you to enjoy yourself except to Mass. That's all we used to go- up to Mass and we used to walk over to Mass at half nine" (Betty).

Betty's father was in the army and her husband was a farm labourer when she met him. Before she married she emigrated to England for a couple of years.

"I went to England you see when I was eighteen or something like that. Over to my two aunties, my two aunties was over there...and I worked there for three year...in a mill. For making carpets and everything. I didn't make carpets now. I was only spinning the...you know the thread on a big long machine, spools you know you had to keep them going and all" (Betty).

Betty describes her life in a favourable light and there is a sense that she feels lucky to have had and have such a good life. "...it wasn't too bad for us anyway. That's one thing I'm certain, you know. We always had plenty and we were never hungry or anything like that" (Betty).

Betty's personal story captures living in Irish society previous to contemporary society. There are subtleties to be found throughout her narrative. The place of religion in her life and how

going to Mass was a social occasion when she was young. Her reflection on her life as ‘not being too bad’ describes a generation of people who were happy if they had food and shelter. This is in contrast with the self-identity analysis of many of those living in contemporary times. Certainly, what Betty’s story is most vital in portraying is the love, affection and pride of a woman who has her children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren around her.

Parenting and grandparenting

Ellen and Kevin Andrews are new grandparents that both participated in this research. The Andrews family are an urban family living in an area close to the centre of Carlow Town. Ellen is 50 and Kevin is 54. They have two sons Eamon aged 21 and Lee aged 15. Eamon and his girlfriend, Casey Farrell aged 19 have a four month old daughter: Sophie Farrell-Andrews. Ellen and Kevin identify the specific issues of concern with their son’s situation namely as him being so young, the unexpected pregnancy and being unemployed. However, there is great joy expressed by both grandparents when they talk about their granddaughter.

There is uniqueness in to this personal story is that Ellen and Kevin have just become grandparents and due to the young age of their son, Eamon. It seems that Kevin and Ellen had not finished their parenting when they became grandparenting. The level of input and roles taken on by Ellen and Kevin seem to be larger than other grandparents in this research. They provide care for their granddaughter and they also provide large amounts of emotional and financial support to Eamon and Casey. Kevin and Ellen describe how they try to find a balance between offering support and not doing too much.

Kevin talks about buying heating oil for them near Christmas and how he bought it for his granddaughter more than his son.

“You know if he’s short of money well that’s his own fault really you know. But we do buy things you know. Well say they had no heating and we bought the central heating oil for them and that kind of stuff. It’s really for the baby as well like you know. It’s more for the baby. I mean Eamon can stay in the house cold if he wants to you know but you don’t want a cold house with a baby you know. Because it’s our grandchild like you know... we do that you know” (Kevin, grandfather aged 54).

Ellen provides a lot of emotional support to Casey especially because Casey’s mother does not live near them. Ellen feels that sometimes she has to point out (delicately) certain issues around the care of her grandchild. However, Ellen sees that Casey is doing a good job with Sophie and she wants to support her anyway she can. Again Ellen like Kevin feels it is necessary for Eamon and Casey to take on the bulk of the responsibilities.

“And she does...she might text me about...she might want me to get her stuff and she mightn't have the money and whatever. And you know I'll always be there for her and any support I can be – I will do. And yet I don't want to kind of...I want them to stand on their own two feet and be responsible. You know you're trying to balance out the two, you know” (Ellen, grandmother aged 50).

Kevin and Ellen illustrate the further complexities of the transition into grandparenthood when the grandparents are or feel they are still parenting their own children.

Breakdown of Relationship - No Paternal Ties: A Modern Reality?

The Phelan Family are a close knit urban family. Eilish Phelan, a grandmother aged fifty-one has a large immediate and extended family. She is the eldest of ten children, all of which including her mother still live in Carlow. She and her husband have six children and they are all based in Carlow. Her eldest daughter Karen aged thirty-two lives next door to Eilish. Karen has been separated from her partner for two years now. She has two children; Dean aged thirteen and Cheryl aged four. Eilish, Karen and Dean participated in this study.

The effects of the end of the relationship between Karen and her partner, Dean and Cheryl's Dad are plentiful. It seems unfair not to highlight that Mark, Karen's ex-partner was not interviewed in this study and that his side of the story remains untold. This is an unbalanced view of the relationship breakdown and its aftermath in totality. However, this study wants to show how families, all families are living in contemporary society. This involves not having an exact definition of family akin to the nuclear family. The heterogeneity of contemporary families must be acknowledged. Saying that, if we take Karen, Dean and Cheryl as a family, it is certainly valid to examine how this relationship breakdown has affected them as a family unit.

There were financial issues for Karen after the separation. She had to start working full time in Dublin to support the family. She describes how hard it was to adjust to the role of the family's main earner. “Desperate, it was such a change. Em, ah it was terrible, it was horrendous. Absolutely horrendous...” (Karen, daughter aged 32).

This was coupled by the lack of financial support given by Mark. “So he...eh...just never gave any money or anything. I had to take him to court for money. It was just ridiculous.” (Karen, daughter aged 32)

Of course Mark did not get to defend or deny this situation but his lack of contact with his children seems to be an undeniable truth. It is not necessary to go into the personal details of the separation that Karen disclosed suffice to say that Mark is now married with children. This is significant in order to view the whole issue of contact between Mark and Dean and Cheryl. Karen describes how Mark was taking Cheryl once a week for a few months after the separation.

“Cheryl saw him for a while and then just stopped wanting to go with him. So I said look...we were meeting him at the church, it was going on for a few weeks...on a Saturday night and she was just roaring in the car going. So I said he may come up to the house and collect her and ask her if she wants to go because I wasn't bringing her down to the church anymore to hand her over while she's crying. So he just never bothered after that. And he never bothered, like he never told Dean he was getting married or nothing. Just completely broke contact with him” (Karen, daughter aged 32).

It is not the job of social research to lay blame or comment on specifics of personal relationship but is important to comment on the larger social issues at play here. It seems that the absence of marriage has made it easier for relationships to breakdown, which often results in the man, the father having no contact with his children. This can be for various reasons, in this case the father seems to have severed the ties himself but in other cases the ties may be severed for him.

It is not only Mark who has lost contact with his children but his parents as well. The result of a separation is too often the absence of contact between paternal grandparents and their grandchildren. It would seem unlikely that many would argue the negative effect on children's lives that this lack of patrilineal ties must have. The enormity of the situation is not lost on Karen. “It is, it's very sad for them. Very, very sad” (Karen, daughter aged 32).

Dean talked about not seeing his paternal grandparents anymore but insisted he was not too bothered about it. His feelings on this were tied to his relationship with his grandparents before his parents split up and centred on them being different to his maternal grandparents. “Well, I don't mind it. It's not a major loss for me” (Dean, grandson aged 13).

Dean describes his paternal grandparents as always being cross and angry. “They are always like...if you don't eat something, they are always saying, you're not going to grow, you're not going to do this and do that...”(Dean, grandson aged 13).

The way Dean feels about his paternal grandparents compared to his maternal grandparents further emphasises the prominence of the matrilineal links in his family.

There have been emotional and practical issues for Karen after her separation. Her parents, Eilish and John have taken on roles that her partner Mark used to carry out. John has become a pseudo-father for Dean.

“Well then now with him (Dean’s dad) not being around, my father especially with Dean, he’d be like a father figure to him now. He’d kind of set the rules a bit and stuff when he’s not listening to me or whatever. He’d step in and Dean what are you doing and all that” (Karen, daughter aged 32).

Eilish worries about Karen especially with regard to the loneliness Karen feels as a single parent. “Well, just personally I’d say loneliness and just someone to talk to. You know say Dean gets a great report someone to share stuff like that with. Or vice versa does something and he needs...” (Eilish, grandmother aged 51).

Eilish feels she needs to be there for Karen, to support her and through this is acting as a pseudo-partner for Karen.

The breakdown of Karen and Mark’s relationship has resulted in the increase of connection and bonds for Dean and Cheryl to the maternal side, which has coincided with the near absence and breakdown of ties with Mark and the paternal side. This has a great impact not only within the Phelan family but also within larger society. If a large portion of fathers are losing contact with some or all of their children this will evidently cut off the relationship between children and their extended paternal family most notably their paternal grandparents.

Conclusion

There were many personal stories that could have been chosen to illustrate the main findings of this research. Each participant’s story was unique and interesting as well as beneficial to the research. The personal stories presented in this chapter are used to promote further understanding of the findings and also to provide a variety in circumstances and issues. It is possible to identify key trends in Irish grandparenting practices:

1. The Unexpected or Expected Transition into Grandparenthood
2. The Middle Generation’s Situation

3. Connectedness

4. Reflexivity

The transition into grandparenthood and the feelings towards becoming a grandparent and aging are often determined by whether the transition is expected or unexpected. The unexpected transition into grandparenthood commonly results in the grandparent being shocked and they often begin to think about their own age and aging.

The situation of the grandparent's own child (the middle generation) is a major factor on what role or roles a grandparent takes on. There is a sense that grandparents often stay in the background until they are or they perceive to be needed. This has been shown on a large scale with grandparents providing childcare due to the increase of female participation in the labour force. There is also an influence of the variety of family types, with many grandparents especially maternal grandparents being highly involved when their own child is a lone parent or separated. This in turn has result in many paternal grandparents becoming less involved or having no involvement with their grandchildren when their own child is separated or has little involvement themselves.

The Connectedness trend refers to the grandparents wanting and enjoying being a part of their grandchild's and child's lives. The grandparents in this study expressed the importance of intergenerational relationships and their enjoyment in the companionship of their extended family.

Finally, grandparents in contemporary society seem to be shifting towards reflexivity in their grandparenting practices. The grandparents in this research often accounted for their grandparenting practices in light of their own experiences as parents and as children. For, example, the working mother who felt she missed out on some aspects of her own children growing up became a grandmother who wanted to be involved in caring for her grandson. This was also present in grandfathers who embraced their 'nurturing role' that they often did not do as fathers. The grandparents' experiences of their childhood influenced their choice of grandparenting practices with particular regard to showing affection and love to their grandchildren.

Although there is certainly diversity within the situations of grandparents in contemporary society, there is still commonality seen through these key trends in Irish grandparenting practices.

Chapter Eight: Key Findings and Discussion

Introduction

This chapter seeks to present the key findings of this research in a clear, tangible manner. The key findings will be concisely presented as they have already been discussed in depth in the previous chapters. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a presentation of the key findings in comparison to previous research, specifically international research discussed in the literature review. This is viewed as essential in the fulfilment of the research's primary aim of investigating and exploring grandparenting in contemporary Ireland with reference to a key objective of using grandparenting research from America, Britain and Australia.

Key Findings

The key findings of this research are:

1. Transition into Grandparenthood
2. Key Trends in Irish Grandparenting Practices
3. Intergenerational Relations
4. Contemporary Societal Change

These key findings represent a framework that encompasses the remaining findings that have been presented in the previous chapters.

The transition into grandparenthood relates to the feelings and experiences of grandparents on becoming a grandparent. The significance of this finding is that this research has shown that this transition influences intergenerational relations, the grandparent role undertaken and the grandparents' feelings around aging. The main issue with the transition into grandparenthood is whether it was expected or unexpected. Although all grandparents in this study expressed their joy of becoming a grandparent, for those who did not expect to become grandparents there was a period of shock and adjustment.

This research has identified four key trends in Irish grandparenting practices:

1. The Unexpected or Expected Transition into Grandparenthood

2. The Middle Generation's Situation
3. Connectedness
4. Reflexivity

These key trends specifically relate to the roles of grandparents in contemporary Ireland. This finding is considered highly useful because it acknowledges how grandparent roles can change over time. The middle generation's situation is particularly useful in displaying how grandparents in this study changed, took on or relinquished certain grandparent roles when their child's situation changed. This may be due to a number of contemporary society issues such as separation, divorce and the childcare needs of a working mother. The connectedness and reflexivity trends may be linked to the methods of life course research. The connectedness refers to intergenerational relations and how many participants in this study stated the importance of the three generations being connected and having good relationships. This is quite similar to 'linked lives' in the life course paradigm that states the importance and influence of relationships in one's life course. The reflexivity or how participants in this research analysed and reviewed their lives is consistent with the notions of lifestyle and life plan present in contemporary society. The life course research methods has provided scope to develop these key trends in Irish grandparenting practices by connecting the trajectory of the personal lives of the research participants to larger cultural and societal changes (Giele and Elder (eds) 1998).

Intergenerational relations is a key finding that comprises of how the three generations interact, the level of importance given to intergenerational relations and the issue of matrilineal and patrilineal bonds. The issue of matrilineal and patrilineal bonds is quite significant as it has been shown in this research to be highly influential in the relationship between grandparents and their grandchildren.

Finally, contemporary societal changes is a broad area but is a necessary key finding as it draws together the vast and diverse changes that have occurred in recent decades in Ireland. It is explicitly linked to all the findings of this research. Family change, changing childhoods, childcare, gender issues, changing communities and self identity combine to illustrate how contemporary society and individual social actors have a dynamic relationship. As mentioned previously this is reflected in the life course paradigm.

Discussion

It is beneficial to compare these key findings with previous research. This will include the international research presented in the literature review as part of the key objectives of this study. It is possible to present the similarities and differences of these key findings in comparison to the previous international research and indicate new ways to consider common issues.

As has been previously stated the key trends in Irish grandparenting practices aimed to be more adaptable than some of the classifications of grandparenting roles (Lundström 2001; Neugarten and Weinstein 1964) seen in previous research. This is not to say that classification of grandparent roles is not beneficial but rather that the key trends of grandparenting practices provide more scope in the understanding of grandparent roles. It allows for the occurrence of grandparents moving from one role to another which has been seen in this research to be common place for contemporary grandparents. A grandmother provides primary childcare for her working daughter but this role decreases when the grandchild starts education. A highly involved paternal grandmother loses contact with her grandchild when her son is divorced. This key finding is comparable to research carried out by Goodfellow and Lavery (2003) who highlight how grandparents seen their grandparenting role as often a support to their own children and indeed Erikson's (1995) concept of 'generativity'. This refers to how kin assistance more often flows from older generations to lower generations than vice versa.

The complexity of the issue of matrilineal ties dominance over patrilineal ties has been displayed in this research as in much previous international research. There is much research which reports that matrilineal bonds are stronger than patrilineal bonds (Fingerman 2004). Lunström (2001) suggest that this is not such a strong dominance in Ireland as it is in other countries especially America. This research found cases where paternal ties had been severed after a relationship breakdown, where a paternal grandmother provided support to her son's girlfriend and granddaughter and where two mothers expressed their desire for their children to have equal connections with both sets of grandparents. It is certain that the strong matrilineal ties and often weaker patrilineal ties certainly deserve consideration but perhaps in a new way. This research suggests that the type of family or family structure can determine the significance of whether a grandparent is paternal or maternal. There is a case to suggest

that the consideration and research of this issue in isolation with diverse family forms may provide more significant insight into matrilineal and patrilineal ties.

The changes in contemporary society found by this research are comparable to much of the literature presented in the literature review chapters. Most grandparents in this study were involved in providing some form of childcare for their grandchildren. This is in line with Gray (2001) who states that grandmothers are providing childcare more than ever before. Fine-Davis (2004) reinforces this and the preference of informal childcare as found by this research. This also reflects the changes in gender roles in contemporary Ireland.

The vast difference in marital status between the grandparent generation and their children's generation found in this research relates to changing gender roles and the occurrence of family change. The grandparent generation in this study are more likely to be married than their children are. Fahey and Russell (2001) account for this shift in marital status with the change in sequence and importance of marriage.

Conclusion

The key findings of this research provide a substantial analysis of grandparenting in contemporary Ireland. The findings have many similarities with the international research discussed here. This reflects how many western societies have experienced similar change. However, there are some issues that are specific to the Irish case and in some instances such as divorce and grandparents' rights Ireland is only starting on its path. Many countries especially America have been dealing with these issues for a much longer time. This research has added to and enriched the previous research. The use of key trends in grandparenting practices as opposed to classification of grandparent roles has been seen to illustrate the fluid nature of contemporary grandparenting.

Chapter Nine: Summary and Conclusion

Summary

This research was carried out in light of demographic and family changes that have occurred in contemporary Irish society. There was a notable minimal amount of research carried out on grandparenting in Ireland compared to internationally, especially in Britain, America and Australia. The primary aim of the research was to research grandparenting in contemporary Ireland in an investigative and exploratory fashion. A clear objective of the research was the inclusion of the child's voice in research which is promoted by The Centre of Family and Social Research at Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT). The research was ethically approved by The Ethics Committee at WIT and the research was carried out with ethical considerations kept to the forefront throughout the research process.

This research conducted qualitative semi-structured interviews. Grandparenting was viewed as an intergenerational relationship. Three generations from one family were interviewed in order to provide a full perspective of grandparenting. Therefore in each family a grandparent, child and grandchild were interviewed where possible. The research was carried out in Carlow Town and its hinterland. Carlow was used because it was deemed to have a variety of participants from different socio-economic backgrounds readily available.

There were 22 participants in the study from 7 different families. There were 5 families living in urban areas and 2 families living in rural areas. They ranged from ages of 8 to 77. The variety of family types in contemporary society was evident from the sample. There was a stark contrast between the grandparent generation who were either married or widowed and their children's generation (the middle generation) who had a variety of family types including, lone parents, married and separated.

The interviews were carried out utilising two forms of consent: informed consent and process consent. It was ensured that participants had all the information relating to the study and what taking part in the study involved. Process consent refers to the participant knowing that they can stop the interview at any stage during the interview and the researcher asking the participant throughout the interview if they wish to stop the interview. The interviews were recorded and the researcher listened to the recordings a number of times. A reflexive journal

was kept by the researcher to identify initial key themes from the interviews and in an attempt to analyse and enhance the data collection process. The data collected was analysed by drawing on grounded theory methods and the life course paradigm. This involved the coding of interview transcripts to identify indicators of concepts which could be evolved further into key findings. The life course and individual's narrative was always referred back to so as not to focus solely on the 'bigger issues' but to consider each participants' story and how it compared and contrasted with the sample as a whole.

The key findings of the research relate to the transition into grandparenthood, key trends in Irish grandparenting practices, intergenerational relations and contemporary societal change. The remaining findings including family change, changes in childhood, childcare, gender issues, aging, romanticism of Ireland in the past, community and self-identity illuminate these key findings.

The grandparents in this study expressed how their transition into grandparenthood was heavily influenced on whether they expected or did not expect to be grandparents. Aging was an issue that many grandparents felt that they were faced with when becoming grandparents for the first time. This related both to their own feelings on aging and wider society's perspective on aging. The majority of grandparents in this study have provided care for their grandchildren either in the past or in present times. This care ranged from occasional babysitting to regular provision of care often when their own children were working. There were various gender issues at play in the findings relating to grandparent roles. The grandmothers were more likely to be involved in care than grandfathers. There was evidence of the increase of men's nurturing role with the fathers in the study being more involved in child rearing than their own fathers had been. The dominance of maternal bonds and its influence on grandparent-grandchild relationships was evident. This was specifically present in certain family types: lone mothers and where separation had occurred.

The role that grandparents take on has been found in this research to depend on four factors which have been identified as the key trends in Irish grandparenting practices:

1. The Unexpected or Expected Transition into Grandparenthood
2. The Middle Generation's Situation
3. Connectedness

4. Reflexivity

The transition into grandparenthood and the feelings towards becoming a grandparent and aging are often determined by whether the transition is expected or unexpected as has been discussed. The situation of the grandparent's own child (the middle generation) is a major factor on what role or roles a grandparent takes on. There is a sense that grandparents often stay in the background until they are or they perceive to be needed. This necessity relates to situations where there may be a need for the grandparent (mostly grandmothers) to provide childcare or where maternal grandparents become highly involved when their own child is a lone parent or separated. This can also result in many paternal grandparents becoming less involved or having no involvement with their grandchildren when their own child is separated or has little involvement themselves. The Connectedness trend refers to the grandparents wanting and enjoying being a part of their grandchild's and child's lives.

Finally, grandparents in contemporary society seem to be shifting towards reflexivity in their grandparenting practices. The grandparents in this research often accounted for their grandparenting practices in light of their own experiences as parents and as children.

It has been portrayed in this research that there is a need to research grandparenting in contemporary Ireland not only due to the changes in demographics, families and society but how all these issues combine to influence an individual's personal story.

Conclusion

The research has provided useful insight into grandparenting in contemporary Ireland. The vast changes which have occurred in contemporary Ireland have been displayed. These changes include changes in demographics, families and childhood. The nuclear family has been replaced by a variety of family types. This has created a space for many grandparents to become more involved in their grandchildren's lives than in previous generations. It seems that these grandparents are often maternal grandparents. Paternal grandparents often experience a decline or complete absence in their relationships with their grandchildren. As a result certain intergenerational bonds are increasing and developing at the same time as other intergenerational bonds are declining.

The changing demographics especially the decrease in mortality rates have translated into grandparent-grandchild relationships having longer time spans than ever before. It has also resulted in the occurrence of great-grandparents. This has increased the significance of grandparenthood as a life stage. It has been shown by this research how many grandparents and indeed most individuals in contemporary society are increasingly more reflexive about their life choices and the roles they take on. Therefore it is necessary to consider how grandparenting will evolve in the future particularly with regard to the provision of childcare by many grandparents (mostly grandmothers).

This research has provided many important findings about grandparenting in contemporary Ireland, particularly the identification of key trends in Irish grandparenting practices. However, it has also prompted more questions that remain unanswered: How will Irish families evolve? What will be the effect on grandchildren and their paternal grandparents who have lost contact through separation or divorce? Will the grandchildren (the youngest generation) view aging and older people in a different way due to the increased span of the grandparent-grandchild relationship? Will they view families in a different way because of the increase in diversity of family types in current times? Finally, many of the grandparents in this study described their grandparenting role in reference to their own reflexivity of their life course; will this constant reflexivity further change their grandparenting role as they and their grandchildren grow older?

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Appendices

Appendix A: Interview Topic Guides

INTERGENERATIONAL RELATIONS

Grandparent – Parent – Child

Benefits to each generation.

Each generation's perspective on relations between the generations.

DIVERSITY OF FAMILY TYPES

Divorce, separation, blended families, lone parents, unmarried couples and stepfamilies.

CHILDCARE

Increase in female participation in workforce.

Two working parent families.

Balance of work and childcare.

Grandparents' role in childcare; grandparents as a resource.

Is there a change in grandparents' role in contemporary Ireland?

Psychological perspective: Effect on children.

AGING SOCIETY

The increase in the percentage of older people in contemporary Ireland.

Social policy perspective: Perceived burden of older people in society Vs. childcare roles of grandparents.

Attitudes to aging- effect on intergenerational relations.

Effect on grandparents' well-being.

MATRILINEAL AND PATRILINEAL TIES

Are there stronger ties across generations on the mother's side compared to the father's side?

May this be compounded with divorce, separation, lone parents and other family types?

FAMILY DYNAMICS

The combination of diversity in family types, stresses and strains of contemporary society and the values within contemporary Ireland – effect on intergenerational relations.

Sociological perspective: Increase in individualism in society and decline of family values.

Appendix B: Flyers

RESEARCH ON GRANDPARENTING

WOULD YOU AND YOUR FAMILY LIKE TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY OF GRANDPARENTING IN CONTEMPORARY IRELAND?

My name is Fiona Murphy and I am currently a post-graduate student of the Masters in Arts (Research) programme in the Centre for Social and Family Research, Department of Applied Arts in Waterford Institute of Technology.

What is the research about?

This research is titled “An exploration of grandparenting in contemporary Ireland”.

This research aims to carry out interviews with three generations of the one family, to include a grandparent, parent and grandchild.

This research will explore issues relating to grandparenting in current times in Ireland.

Examples of issues are:

WHAT ROLES ARE GRANDPARENTS CARRYING OUT?

HOW DO THE DIFFERENT GENERATIONS INTERACT?

WHAT DOES EACH GENERATION THINK ABOUT GRANDPARENTING?

WHAT ARE THE FACTORS THAT AFFECT FAMILY LIFE?

What participating requires?

You and two members of your family are asked to participate separately in interviews.

You will be asked to tell the researcher about how has family life and the role of grandparenting changed and answer questions on your views on grandparenting.

The research is under the supervision of Fergus Hogan, Co-ordinator of the Centre for Social and Family Research at the Waterford Institute of Technology and has been approved by its Ethics Committee.

If you are interested in participating...

Please contact for further information: 086 4043371 or femurphy@wit.ie

Appendix C: Consent Form: Adult

“Grandparenting” PARTICIPATION CONSENT FORM

You are asked to participate in a postgraduate research study conducted by Fiona Murphy, from the Centre for Social and Family Research, Department of Applied Arts at Waterford Institute of Technology.

The study is titled “An exploration of grandparenting in contemporary Ireland”.

This an information sheet with this form, explaining what the study is all about and what we hope to do with this study. Fiona will read it with you and please Fiona to explain anything that you do not understand on the information sheet.

Fiona is under the supervision of Fergus Hogan, Co-ordinator of the Centre for Social and Family Research. If you have any questions or concerns about this research or information contained in this form, please feel free to contact Fergus Hogan at fhogan@wit.ie

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to get the life stories of grandparents, parents and grandchildren and to get their opinions on grandparenting.

PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, we would ask you to do the following things:

1. Participate in a one-to-one interview, lasting about forty to sixty minutes with the researcher about your family life and grandparenting.
2. Be open and honest in answering the questions asked. What you say to the researcher will be confidential and every possible measure will be taken to ensure that you will not be identified. The researcher will only know your identity and your name will not be used when writing up the research.
3. You may refuse to answer questions you don't want to answer and still remain in the study.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

Participation in this research is completely voluntary. This means that if at any point you wish to end the interview and/ or withdraw from this study you may do so. Also if at any point the researcher feels that you are emotionally unable to participate they may also end the interview and/or your participation in the study. Your welfare will always be the main concern.

It is possible that speaking about your family life may result in feelings of discomfort. The researcher will keep this in mind at all times and do their best to approach these matters in the most sensitive manner possible.

Specifically where reports of abuse are made, the interview will be stopped and the researcher and supervisor will ensure that it is referred to the appropriate authorities.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF THE RESEARCH

This research seeks to gain understanding of grandparenting within Irish families today and therefore the changes within families and Irish society.

VOLUNTARY NATURE OF PARTICIPATION

You will not be paid any money or receive any reward of any kind for participation in this research. Also, please be aware that if you decide not to participate in this study it is not a problem, you will receive no punishment for refusing. It is completely voluntary.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Every effort will be made to ensure confidentiality of any identifying information that is obtained in connection with this study.

During the interview you will be recorded, either by tape recorder and/or by written record, whichever you might prefer. This information will then be transcribed and thereafter will be placed in a password-protected file so that it cannot be accessed by anyone other than the researcher. The recordings of the interview will be kept for the duration of the research and a period of two years thereafter. The information you give will be used only for the purposes of this research unless you agree otherwise.

Your name will be changed in order to protect your identity and the researcher will have only one document, password protected, on computer stating your actual name and the 'new' name so that the only person who can identify you is the researcher. None of these files will be printed into paper format. Should it be necessary to do so for any unforeseen reason the file will be stored in a locked filing cabinet and immediately shredded once it has served its purpose.

RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. This study has been

reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Waterford Institute of Technology Ethics Committee. If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact:

ETHICS COMMITTEE
Waterford Institute of Technology,
Cork Road,
Waterford.

CONSENT SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

I have read the information provided for this study “An exploration of grandparenting in contemporary Ireland”. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate with this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT

Name of Participant (please print)

Signature of Participant

Date

SIGNATURE OF WITNESS/RESEARCHER

Name of Witness/Researcher (please print)

Signature of Witness /Researcher

Date

Do you consent to the information provided by you being retained and used in further research of this kind?
Yes No

Appendix D: Consent Form: Child

PARTICIPATION CONSENT FORM FOR MINORS

We would like you to take part in a project that will hopefully be interesting and fun. Your mother or father must also give permission for you to take part, so please be sure to ask them questions about anything that you do not understand, as it is important that they know exactly what you feel about all of this.

The person who is in charge of this study, and who will ask you questions, is Fiona Murphy who is a postgraduate studying at the Waterford Institute of Technology. If there is anything you need to ask Fiona, please feel free to ask whatever questions you want.

The study is titled “An exploration of grandparenting in contemporary Ireland”

There is information sheet with this form, explaining what the study is all about and what we hope to do with this study. Please read it and ask your parents or Fiona to explain anything that you do not understand on the information sheet.

If you have any questions that you do not want to ask either Fiona or your parents, or if you are worried about anything to do with this study, please contact Fergus Hogan as fhogan@wit.ie. Fergus is in charge of the whole thing, and knows all about it.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

We are asking people about their families and about grandparents.

PROCEDURES

If you agree to join in this study, we would ask you to do the following things:

1. Talk to the researcher for about forty to sixty minutes, where the researcher will ask you questions.
2. Be open and honest in answering the questions asked.
3. Your answers will remain secret and we will make sure that nobody else will see them. We will not use your name when we make notes on your answers.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

You might feel a bit embarrassed or uncomfortable with some of the questions. There is nothing wrong with you feeling these things and if you do not want to answer a question or if you want to stop for a while, please tell the person who is asking the questions. The person asking the questions will not get angry if you do not want to answer questions or if you want to stop for a while. You do not have to answer any questions if you do not want to.

If the interview becomes too upsetting or if ‘abuse’ is reported, the interview will stop but Fiona and Fergus will help you with this matter.

We are not allowed to give you money for this – Sorry about that!

CONSENT SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH PARTICPANT

I have read the information sheet for the study “ An exploration of grandparenting in contemporary Ireland”. I am happy with the answers given to my questions, and I agree to take part in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT

Name of Participant (please print)

Signature of Participant

Date

SIGNATURE OF PARENT

Name of Parent (please print)

Signature of Parent

Date

SIGNATURE OF WITNESS/RESEARCHER

Name of Witness/Researcher (please print)

Signature of Witness/Researcher

Date

Do you consent to the information provided by you being retained and used in further research of this kind?

Yes No