

Managing grandparental involvement in child-rearing in the context of intensive motherhood

Elizaveta Sivak,
National Research University 'Higher School of Economics', Moscow (Russia)

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Intergenerational conflicts (Clarke et al., 1999)

Intergenerational ambivalence (Luescher, 2011)

Mothers as gatekeepers
(Sims, Rofail, 2013)



Background

Intensive motherhood

Parental determinism

Risk-consciousness

Expert oriented parenting culture

Hays 1998, Furedi 2001, Faircloth 2010, Lee et al. 2014, etc.

Research questions

How is this discourse of intensive parenting and risks transmitted and enacted in familial relations around raising a child?

How do mothers experience grandparental involvement and perceive grandparental authority in childrearing?

How do mothers deal with 'wrong' childrearing practices of grandparents and anxiety over it?

Russian context: intensive parenting

A rising market of early development centers

Vast industry of childcare advice

Emerging parenting education

Various experts (in babywearing, breast feeding, attachment theory, etc.)



Russian context: grandparenting





STUDENTS! Do your homework yourself!

- *I'll do it!*

(1956)

Russian context: grandparenting

High rates of co-residing:

30% of multigenerational households in Russia

5% in France

In **37%** families with children under 14 grandmother or grand-grandmother are involved in child-rearing

In **9%** grandfather of grand-grandfather

20% of grandparents in France, Germany, Belgium, Austria provide childcare on an everyday basis (Herlofson & Hagestad 2012)

40% in southern Europe

Sample

- 50 interviews with mothers ('core' sample – 25 informants), 2014-2015
- At least one child under school age (1-7 years old)
- Recruiting: announcements in online-communities+ snowballing
- Living in Moscow
- High level of education
- Almost all are currently employed
- Almost all married
- On average one or two children

Results

Undermined grandparental authority

family experience is rejected on both 'theoretical'
and 'empirical' grounds

Bad parenting practices

Parents' practices are what mothers' want to
overcome – not adopt

I've encountered such behavior [*manipulative methods of education, used by her parents - intimidation, bribery, etc.*], and **this has had a negative effect on my self-esteem and ability to cope with different situations**, including traumatic experiences. I believe that if my parents had helped me out and shown an ability to deal effectively with such situations without humiliation, intimidation, shaming, disgust, and self-pity, **then I would have used many years of my life more effectively** – not on the analysis of this pile of problems. So **I want to save my child from this unnecessary strain**

A., 35 years, one child, 3 years

I'm trying to minimize the grandparents' involvement in child-rearing. Me and my husband have already experienced it ourselves, and we agree that, to be honest, it was not the best parenting. It had some results, but it was far from perfect. And we don't want a repetition of that on our children.

M., 29 years, one child, 4 years

Results

Undermined grandparental authority

family experience is rejected on both 'empirical' and 'theoretical' grounds

Bad parenting practices

big impact of small actions

Parents' practices are what mothers' want to overcome – not adopt

Now, since I became involved in psychotherapy, I've let it go. But before that I thought that any adult who said something to my child in a 'wrong' way could ruin everything, could instill the wrong thoughts.

V., 30 years, one child, 4.5 years

'a thoughtlessly said casual word can deeply affect the child'

'small things are small, but they repeat time after time'

Results

Undermined grandparental authority

family experience is rejected on both 'empirical' and
'theoretical' grounds

Bad parenting practices

Parents' practices are what mothers' want to
overcome – not adopt

For many years I was afraid to have children. I was very afraid that I would behave like my mother, because I had rage attacks on my cat [*laughs*]. **My confidence in myself as a mother was undermined, and attachment theory helped me restore it.**

P., 34 years, one child, 3 years

Grandmothers [*the child's grandmothers*] have the arsenal of techniques which were used even by their parents. I think **we are the first generation who is trying to approach parenthood consciously**, because before that everything was based on tradition

A., 32 years, one child, 1 year

Results

Strategies of dealing with grandparental involvement in childrearing

Micro-managing

Education and negotiations

Reformatting of grandparental involvement in child-rearing

Providing the child with the correct interpretation of that experience

Counter-stories

I came up with a story [*for grandparents*] that we know that grandparents have a lot of things to do, and I don't want to bother them, so we communicate in a framework of just 'showing up to visit them'. So, my decision was **not to put them in any position like 'sitting with the kids', where they would need to solve any problems concerning them.**

S., 37 years, three children, from 5 to 11 years old

Results

Strategies of dealing with grandparental involvement in childrearing

Micro-managing

Education and negotiations

Reformatting of grandparental involvement in child-rearing

providing the child with the 'correct' interpretation of grandparents' actions

Counter-stories

My job is simply to tell him, against this background [*the grandmother doing what the child himself is supposed to do, everything that the child wants, etc.*] that actually it's not easy for Grandma to do all these things, and that she has problems with her back, and that is not normal that she is crawling here on the floor with him, and that it's only because she loves him very much.

E., 30 years, one child, 4 years

Results

Strategies of dealing with grandparental involvement in childrearing

Micro-managing

Counter-stories

benefits of a child's experience of different parenting practices

Reconsidering grandparents' influence as less strong than that of parents

Acknowledging the special role of grandparents

Results

Strategies of dealing with grandparental involvement in childrearing

Micro-managing

Counter-stories

benefits of a child's experience of different parenting practices

Reconsidering grandparents' influence as less strong than that of parents ('I just hope that the moments when I am with my daughter myself will eliminate all these things')

Acknowledging the special role of grandparents

Results

Strategies of dealing with grandparental involvement in childrearing

Micro-managing

Counter-stories

benefits of a child's experience of different parenting practices

Reconsidering grandparents' influence as less strong than that of parents

Acknowledging the special role of grandparents ("there should be such a person in a child's life, who pampers her, grandmothers are those who lay the ground of 'absolute kindness', not the parents")

Conclusions

- Grandparents' involvement in raising a child may initially be seen as a possible threat to the child or interference – not support
- Uncritical belief in experts, a detailed analysis and critical attitude to grandparents' knowledge and practices
- Mothers constantly shape grandparental involvement, children interpretations of grandparents' practices, and their own perception of grandparental involvement