



Parental leave and grandparent's role in Spanish families' work/life balance strategies

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1. INTRODUCTION

As in other developed countries, in Spain the **growth in the proportion of women**, especially women with children, joining the **workforce** in recent years has accentuated the social importance of the work-life balance. Further to Eurostat data, the percentage of Spanish women aged 25 to 54 with paid employment rose from 38.8 % in 1992 to **62.3 % in 2014**, peaking at 66.3 % immediately prior to the crisis in 2007.

The transition from the single to the dual income family has been possible thanks primarily to inter-generational support: whereas **in 1993 15 % of grandparents** 65 or older reported that they were engaged in caring for their grandchildren, **in 2010 it was 35%**. Ambiguity prevails among grandparents about their role: they feel like “all-purpose” grandparents, with connotations fluctuating between demeaning and heroic.

Pluralization of resources for balancing working and family lives: Fuelled by European Union policies, favouring the family-work balance has acquired increasingly greater importance in Spanish social policy: parental leave policy, reducing the age for first enrolment in school, increase in preschool childcare facilities and furthering change in business culture and labour relations. Additionally, fathers have become more and more involved in childcare and domestic chores and families make more use of live-in domestic help, particularly after the steep rise in immigration

Despite its social significance, however, grandparents' involvement in childcare in Spanish society is still poorly understood. We want:

- (1) to **estimate the scope of the support received** from grandparents in caring for **children under 13** in Spain;
- (2) to identify the **factors associated with a higher frequency** of this type of care, stressing in particular the **impact of the use of other harmonisation resources**.

2. FACTORS CONDITIONING GRANDPARENTAL CHILDCARE: STATE-OF-THE-ART

Non custodial childcare depends on:

- a) Grandparents' availability depends on and parents
- b) The surrounding circumstances, essentially labour market conditions (flexibility, schedules and wages), public family furtherance policies (availability and accessibility of public childcare and life-work balance policies for parents, such as unpaid leave and shorter hours), the conditions prevailing in the private childcare market (availability of nearby centres, prices and quality) and cultural mores on inter-generational relations and paternal-filial responsibilities.
- c) Socioeconomic circumstances.

a.1) Grandparents' availability depends on:

Lineage: mother's parents are more likely to care (Nicholson and Davey Zeece, 2008; Pérez Ortiz 2007)

Gender: mixed results (Tobío, 2010; Meil, 2011)

Age: grows till 67 and then declines (Baydar and Brooks-Gunn, 1998; controlling for other relevant variables)

Working-status: Hank and Buber (2007) , Zamarro (2011)

Geographical distance: Nicholson and Davey Zeece, 2008; Meil, 2011

a.2)

Mother' working time: full vs part-time job (Marí-Klose, 2010; Aasve, Arpino and Goisis, 2012)

Father's involvement in childcare (Meil and Rogero-Garcia, 2015)

Age of the child(ren): Nicholson and Davey Zeece, 2008; Meil, 2011

b) Public childcare availability (Igel and Szydlik, 2011; Albertini, Kohli and Vogel, 2007; Zamarro, 2011)

c) Income: more frequent in lower income families (Vandell et al., 2003; Moreno Mínguez, 2007 found relationship between preference for nurseries and income level)



The foregoing review led to the formulation of five hypotheses.

- H_1 . Grandparental assistance rises when one of the parents is absent, i.e., among lone-parent families.
- H_2 . Grandparental childcare is less frequent among higher income families.
- H_3 . The use of other public or private resources lowers the frequency of grandparental involvement.
- H_4 . The longer the hours devoted by parents to caring for their children, the lower is grandparental participation.
- H_5 . The greater the parents' dedication to paid work, the higher is the frequency of grandparental childcare.

3. METHODOLOGY

Data basis come from the survey “**Parental Use in Spain, 2012**” (1), a representative telephone survey applied to 4 000 individuals aged 25 to 59 living in a household in Spain during the first quarter of 2012. In particular we have taken the subsample of **2 304 parents of children under 13** who had at least one living grandparent. The interviewed persons were either fathers or mothers, therefore not grandparents themselves.

The dependent variable was the “frequency with which grandparents usually help to care for the respondent’s children” (*daily, weekly, several times a month, several times a year or never*)

(a) *Individual circumstances of parents*: **mother’s work situation**: no paid work (less than 35 hours, 35-40 hours, over 40 hours and variable number of hours); the **father’s work situation** (employed/unemployed) number of **hours** devoted by the mother to **childcare** (continuous variable); number of hours devoted by the father to childcare (continuous variable); and **age of youngest child** (0-2, 3-5, 6-8, 9-12).

(b) *Surrounding circumstances*: net monthly **household income** (under €900, €901-1 500, €1 501-2 000, €2 001-2 500, €2 501-3 000, and over €3 000); number of **generations living in the same household** (two or three); number of children (1, 2 or 3+); distance from the nearest grandparent (less or more than 15 minutes).

(c) *Use of harmonisation resources*. **parental leave-taking** (part or full time) at the time of the interview or prior thereto (1=taken); **No. of hours of paid domestic work** (1=less than 10 hours weekly); whether or not the **children have lunch at school** (1=yes).

Statistical techniques:

- Contingency tables
- A binary logistics regression model was used to explore the factors inducing daily as opposed to less frequent grandparental involvement in two-parent families

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Frequency with which members of parents' social network provide childcare for children under 13, by sex and type of relationship: Spain 2012

	Maternal grandparents	Paternal grandparents	Maternal or paternal grandparents	Other relatives, friends or neighbours
Daily	23	12	26	3
Weekly	20	20	22	8
Several times a month	18	18	17	14
Several times a year	15	17	12	16
Never	24	32	19	59
Total	100	100	100	100
Number of cases	2 168	2 090	2 287	2 304

- 26 % of parents with children under 13 claimed to receive daily support from at least one grandparent.
- 31 % of families reporting no or only occasional support.
- There is a greater involvement on the part of maternal than paternal grandparents.
- Support tends to rest on inter-generational relations; other network members play no or only a marginal role in most cases.

Table 2. Percentage of families receiving daily childcare support from maternal or paternal grandparents by age of youngest child and type of family: Spain 2012

Age of youngest child	Two-parent families				Lone-parent families	All families
	Neither employed	One employed	Both employed	Total		
0 to 2	48	29	38	35	62	35
3 to 5	22	18	29	24	48	25
6 to 8	21	15	24	20	38	21
9 to 12	19	9	20	16	30	16
Total (0 to 12)	29	19	29	25	42	26
N	136	866	1 176	2 178	126	2.304

- The younger the children, the more frequent was support.
- Support was much more frequent among lone-parent families
- Daily grandparental aid is more frequent among dual-earner families, however, it is not their most common harmonisation strategy even if they have children under 3
- Families in which neither parent was employed received daily grandparental assistance as often as those in which both had paid work

These findings confirm H₁ and consequently suggest that in most cases support is closely related to specific needs.

The fact that also one-earner families receive often grandparental support in childcare, suggest that there are **different meanings** associated with the term “daily grandparental **childcare support**”, both in terms of the activities regarded to constitute “assistance” and the definition of “daily” frequency.

In families with no breadwinners, one hypothesis that would have to be explored is whether care is provided less to cover parents’ absence than to meet basic needs (feeding, keeping them warm at home)



Table 3. Logistic regression analysis for factors related to daily grandparental childcare in two-parent families (base: no grandparental childcare received): Spain 2012

	B	Wald	Sig.	Exp(B)
Mother's paid work (base: none)		55.659	.000	
Less than 35 hours/week	.851	20.944	.000	2.343
35 to 40 hours/week	1.326	54.531	.000	3.766
Over 40 hours/week	1.029	17.024	.000	2.799
Variable No. of hours	.474	1.449	.229	1.607
Father employed	-.071	.143	.705	.931
No. of hours devoted by mother to childcare	-.010	.174	.677	.990
No. of hours devoted by father to childcare	-.045	2.916	.088	.956
Age of youngest child (base: 0 to 2)		57.583	.000	
3 to 5	-.502	10.893	.001	.605
6 to 8	-.814	21.053	.000	.443
9 to 12	-1.328	51.797	.000	.265
Income level	-.119	7.034	.008	.888
Three generations in same household (base: two generations)	2.474	68.211	.000	11.875
No. of children (base: one)		8.899	.012	
Two	-.105	.703	.402	.900
Three or more	-.690	8.887	.003	.502
Grandparents less than 15 min. away	1.088	65.297	.000	2.969
Parental leave taken	-.407	5.833	.016	.666
Children lunching at school	-.676	25.833	.000	.509
Domestic help used (base: less than 10 hours/week)	-1.064	13.747	.000	.345
Constant	-3.442	58.780	.000	.032

Goodness of fit: Nagelkerke's $R^2 = 0.23$

The logit analysis confirms H_2 and H_3 : daily grandparental care declined when extra-family harmonisation resources were used and where income was higher:

	B	Wald	Sig.	Exp(B)
Parental leave taken	-.407	5.833	.016	.666
Children lunching at school	-.676	25.833	.000	.509
Domestic help used (base: less than 10 hours/week)	-1.064	13.747	.000	.345
Income level	-.119	7.034	.008	.888

H_4 , according to which greater involvement by both parents reduces the frequency of grandparental participation, cannot be accepted, even though that frequency was observed to decline with fathers' rising involvement in two-parent families

	B	Wald	Sig.	Exp(B)
No. of hours devoted by mother to childcare	-.010	.174	.677	.990
No. of hours devoted by father to childcare	-.045	2.916	.088	.956

H_5 , the greater the parents' dedication to paid work, the higher is the frequency of grandparental childcare, could only be confirmed for the mother

	B	Wald	Sig.	Exp(B)
Mother's paid work (base: none)		55.659	.000	
Less than 35 hours/week	.851	20.944	.000	2.343
35 to 40 hours/week	1.326	54.531	.000	3.766
Over 40 hours/week	1.029	17.024	.000	2.799
Variable No. of hours	.474	1.449	.229	1.607
Father employed	-.071	.143	.705	.931

Other logistic regression analysis findings that merit mention are the confirmation that the **age of the youngest child** and the **distance between the two generations' homes**, including also the **number of generations living in the household**.

For **lone-parent families**, such an analysis can't be done, due to the small number of cases (126 cases); only an analysis with two independent variables could be run. The findings showed that the only variables that conditioned the likelihood of receiving daily grandparental support were the **youngest child's age** and the **number of generations living in the household**

5. CONCLUSIONS

Grandparents' involvement in caring for their grandchildren is an important asset to Spanish families' work/life balance strategies.

Daily grandparental involvement in childcare is not unusual in Spain, particularly prior to children's enrolment in pre-school and when both parents have paid employment or no employment at all, but it is not the most frequent strategy, except for one-parent families.

Grandparental support intensifies in situations where time and financial needs are particularly acute.

Resorting to grandparents as a harmonisation strategy declines in importance with rising social status. An hypothesis that we can't confirm with our data es that parents with higher levels of education avoid grandparental involvement in childcare (among others) because they regard it as a non-specialised service that has an opportunity cost in terms of education.

The pluralization of work/life balance resources tend to lower dependency on family solidarity networks. This implies that a significant part of familism in Spain is forced by structural constrictions.

Father's involvement in childcare, in particular, reduces also the dependency on grandparents support (as we could show and discuss in another paper Meil & Rogero, 2015).

Despite different limitations of this analysis, the findings provide new and significant information on grandparental childcare in Spain.

Thanks very much for your attention

This presentation is based on the article currently under evaluation by Meil, G.; Rogero-García and Romero-Balsas, P.: Grandparent's Role in Spanish Families' Work/Life Balance Strategies

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Related publications

Meil, G. and Rogero-García, J.(2015): Does paternal childcare replace grandparental support in the work - family balance? in Family Science, 6, 1, pp 31-37